

RUMLEY, MARK ALVIS, Ed.D. Listening to the Voices of Beginning Teachers: Providing Meaningful Administrative Support Is a Moral Act and Results in Increasing Retention Among Beginning Educators. (2010)  
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The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand and “make sense” of how beginning teachers experience and define lack of principal/administrative support during their beginning years of teaching. Utilizing grounded theory as a conceptual framework, I sought to deconstruct the stories and lived experiences of nine beginning teachers across eight school districts in North Carolina and to generate substantive theory regarding the phenomena associated with principal support. Educational research around this topic has largely reported numbers and corresponding percentages related to novice teacher attrition, but little qualitative work with teachers themselves has been undertaken to deconstruct and fully understand what they classify as principal support or the lack thereof during initial employment years.

Various data, reports and resulting trends, as documented by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF), continue to confirm that many beginning teachers either transfer to other schools/districts to find supportive environments, or they leave the profession entirely as a result of perceiving that adequate administrative support was not provided.

This study used multiple interviews and focus group sessions to capture the lived experiences of six participants who have remained in teaching but who transferred to settings where they reported having received support; it also includes stories and

experiences from three teachers who left after one, two, or three years of experience for the reported reason of “lack of principal/administrative support.”

This work found that matters related to presence, communication, trust, and integrity are at the heart of principal support and that novice teachers make assessments about principal support with regard to specific leadership traits and characteristics that principals embody and display within these four categories. Both the quantity and quality of interactions, experienced over time between novice teachers and their principals, form the very basis upon which beginning teachers determine and report whether or not they have experienced principal/administrative support. Similarly, these teachers’ reasons for remaining in their schools, leaving their work settings, or resigning from the teaching profession emanate directly from their experiences related to principal support as defined herein.

While the findings from this study cannot be generalized across larger populations of beginning teachers, they do suggest that much more qualitative work needs to be undertaken with novice teachers. Doing so would allow the profession to understand even more about the importance of principals’ presence, manner and frequency of communication, trust-building, and matters related to both fostering and maintaining integrity.

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF BEGINNING TEACHERS:  
PROVIDING MEANINGFUL ADMINISTRATIVE  
SUPPORT IS A MORAL ACT AND RESULTS  
IN INCREASING RETENTION AMONG  
BEGINNING EDUCATORS

by

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Approved by

Charles P. Gause  
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I dedicate this dissertation to those family and close friends in my life who have encouraged me and offered their unwavering support as I pursued this personal and professional goal. I make this dedication to my mother, Carrie Parker Rumley, to my deceased father, Jesse Willard Rumley, both of whom served as my most ardent supporters, and to my children, Chadbourne Mark Rumley, Catherine Elizabeth Rumley, and Christopher Scott Rumley.

I further dedicate this dissertation to the following individuals who have supported me in significant ways throughout my life and career and who, in so many specific ways, inspired me to pursue and complete this dream: Elizabeth Ann Moser, daughter-in-law; Gertrude Parker Scott, aunt; Doris Parker McCauley, aunt; Dr. James V. Cobb, Jr., (deceased) father-in-law; Dr. Judith B. Howard, colleague and friend; Linda Mann Loy, colleague and friend; Robert Burns King, former professor and friend; The Reverend Dr. Charles Williams (deceased), minister; Nancy Lavender Williams, friend; Samuel Lane Meares, colleague and friend; Tammy Eldridge Miller, colleague and friend; Sherry Reece Hinshaw, colleague and friend; and Ann Wilson Davis, colleague and friend;

The schools and school districts in this dissertation have been  
named in your honor and memory (Appendix F).

## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Overview**

The teacher shortage in the United States has been well documented for some time now. Beginning a few years ago, various print and non-print media sources warned that a looming crisis was imminent, noting that teachers were leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Easley, 2006). The crisis arrived, has not slowed in momentum, and currently we continue to be perplexed about how we will produce enough teachers to fill a growing number of empty classrooms across the nation, particularly as states and school districts face mounting budget cuts. Student enrollment has continued to rise between 2002 and 2010 by nearly 2% annually; based upon data available through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2003), this rise in enrollment will continue. Coupling growing enrollment trends with significantly high teacher exodus patterns yielded a need in 2003 for more than 150,000 teachers to be hired each year. However, given the global economic crises of 2008, 2009, and a non-rebounding United States economy still in 2010, school districts are dismissing teachers and closing schools at alarming rates.

Nationally, the percentage of teachers leaving the profession a decade ago within their first five years escalated to 30 % (Halford, 1998; Merrow, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1998). In 2010, a solid 30% and perhaps upwards of 50% of new teachers in selected

regions of the country have continued to exit the profession within five years of service (Gonzalez, Brown, and Slate, 2008). This problem continues to be studied by states, foundations, and agencies with strong ties to education. Many of the entities, including the business community, continue to seek both short-term fixes and long term solutions to prevent teachers from leaving the profession within their first years of service. As a way of posing possible remedies, both educational researchers and practitioners have begun to identify some of the many and wide-ranging reasons for the current teacher shortage, including issues related to inadequate salaries, benefits packages, limited resources, inadequate mentor programs, irate parents, unmotivated students, and a plethora of other factors associated with those professionals who leave teaching (Menchaca, 2003).

My personal interest in this topic resulted from my recent work as a university faculty member and administrator as well as from time spent in the principalship. Providing appropriate structures and meaningful support systems for beginning teachers has been important to me for a long time. For seven years, I was able to design, implement, and teach in a specific support effort for first and second year teachers. This program was co-sponsored between a school district and an independent institution of higher education, which brought together new teachers, master teachers from the district, and university faculty. “Successful Beginnings – Year 1 and 2 Programs” grew out of my own desire to support new teachers well and culminated in two highly structured but voluntary programs that sought to accomplish specific goals directly related to supporting new teachers effectively. The effort sought to provide a comfortable and professional setting where beginning educators could exchange ideas, network with colleagues and

other area educational professionals, extend knowledge and skills of educational issues and practices through various professional development sessions, and seek solutions to problems and concerns that were often encountered during the first two years of teaching. Additionally, social activities were provided to foster collegial relationships between participants and other educational professionals. The ultimate goal of this program was to assist and support new teachers in ways that would allow them to emerge from their novice experiences as confident, highly effective professionals. By design, these cohorts of teachers shared many of their stories and lived experiences as beginning teachers. Their stories were powerful and moved me to understand anew the importance of supporting this particular cadre of educators.

In nearly all studies conducted about why teachers leave the profession or why they change schools or school districts, one noted reason that a growing number of teachers are citing is “lack of support” (NCTAF, 2003; ABSS Teacher Recruitment and Retention Committee Final Report, 2004; NC’s Teaching Force, 2004, System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2004-2005). Most often, too, in reports that rank numbers, corresponding percentages, and associated reasons for leaving, the category entitled “lack of support” is typically included. It appears that the data for these reports are generated largely from interviews or surveys of exiting teachers. It is important to note that the survey method, often a question/answer format, allows teachers to self-report either orally or in writing their reason(s) for leaving – like “lack of support” - while the interview method typically relies upon district personnel officers to record the verbal responses and resulting reason(s) for educational professionals who are interviewed upon their departure.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The category “lack of support” is an intriguing concept/reason for why teachers leave the profession. Some studies have already shown that “principal support” is critical to teachers’ well-being and is tied directly to decisions affecting their reasons to remain in the profession (Gerston, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Perhaps delving into the particulars about “lack of support” as an officially identified reason for educators leaving the profession may also offer some new insights into why selected teachers sometimes state the exact same reason for transferring to different schools or districts. It is therefore of interest to examine the anecdotal information gleaned from even a few novice and perhaps some career teachers who may convey that principals are perceived by teachers as either supporting them well or not at all.

It is at this juncture that “lack of support” may begin to be better defined, albeit still informally and, no doubt, with multiple variations of interpretation. Yet, to learn from teachers how “lack of support” is defined would also allow educational professionals to know what “support” is by principals and administrators from the viewpoints of teachers themselves. Equally interesting would be to investigate through either novice or career teachers, to determine if there appears to be little or no “middle ground” on this issue, perpetuating the hypothesis that teachers either feel supported and remain in the profession, or they leave, sometimes because they do not view themselves as being supported.

Perhaps the most intriguing question here is why do teachers seemingly align the concept of support or lack thereof directly to one person in the school – the principal?



Since most schools have deputy, vice, or assistant principals, and in some cases additional evaluators (either internal or external), the question must be asked why “support” is equated with the particular behaviors of, conversations and interactions with, and decisions made by principals themselves? Any initial answers to these questions, either from the literature or from practicing educators, still seem to beg for more questions and answers. Do supervisors and evaluators, other than principals, play any part in whether or not teachers feel they are supported administratively? Moreover, can specific types of decisions or interactions between principals and teachers, including relations to and exchanges with other supervisors, be uncovered to yield insight about a holistic notion of support? Finally, how can the answers to these questions enlighten the entire conversation and subsequent practices surrounding teacher retention? It is the answers to these questions and additional ones that emerge that can best be answered through the lived experiences of teachers themselves.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

Because there are so many currently identified reasons for teachers leaving either the profession or their assigned schools/districts, it is somewhat unrealistic to think that the retention of teachers can be significantly increased due to the findings of this study; however, answers to the inherent questions in this work could offer some insight and possibly point the way to some new strategies in the arena of teacher retention. Being content **not** to pursue the answers to these questions will continue to yield no new insights into this particular and important category, “lack of support,” that teachers continually cite as one viable reason for their leaving. Perhaps discovering some new

insights and answers to new questions may result in fresh understandings and bring about some novel retention efforts to ultimately reduce the number of educators leaving because of “lack of support” from their principals or administrators. Additionally, principals, teachers, and those who have an interest in education may benefit from the understandings and enlightenment that this study’s findings may provide around this concept.

### **Importance of the Study**

This study is important to conduct because it will allow the stories and lived experiences of beginning educators to speak. By design, the data will literally capture the voices of specific novice teachers, and a deep analysis should yield a theoretical framework on why teachers leave the profession. I also believe that this study will generate meaningful findings around the notion of new teacher support. While much quantitative data (specifically numbers and percentages) can be found from state to state and generally across the United States regarding both beginning and career teacher attrition, very little qualitative data exists from which careful deconstructions and in-depth analyses shed important findings around this particular problem. The rich details of participants’ lived experiences in their schools and classrooms are critically important to understand better the myriad of difficulties that novice teachers face, especially regarding their sometimes perceived lack of support from assigned administrators and principals. Therefore, it may be concluded that a gap currently exists in this work. Launching a qualitative study that focuses specifically on participants who have experienced “lack of support” from their principals may begin to pave the way for

understanding more deeply what principal/administrative support is and is not for beginning teachers.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since the early 1990's, there has been much discussion surrounding what was likely thought of and perhaps labeled at the time as an impending teacher shortage. Some fifteen or more years later, much of America finds itself clearly in the middle of a crisis, with the demand for hiring more than 200,000 K-12 teachers across the country each year (Menchaca, 2003). With an average of 30% of teachers exiting the profession within their first five years (Halford, 1998, Merrow, 1999), along with an estimated 50% in urban areas (Merrow, 1999), the national attrition rate is staggering and provides a graphically alarming picture about the state of education in our nation. One additional factor contributing to fewer numbers of teachers is the decline among college and university students who choose teaching as a major and career path. While this is one source of the problem, a "more profound dilemma is that of addressing the high number of prepared teachers who are leaving the profession" (Menchaca, 2003, p. 1). As a result, much attention has been given to teacher retention efforts during the last decade.

#### **Teacher Retention**

As a way of providing solutions to the problems associated with the teacher exodus, much of the former and current work in teacher retention examines categorical reasons for teachers leaving the profession. One sample list of reasons for teachers leaving a particular school district might include these: low pay, high-stress job, lack of

support from administration, school safety and discipline, lack of support from community, dissatisfaction with teaching, retirement, family responsibilities, and a host of other categorical reasons. Once annual data is available from surveys or interviews of exiting teachers, the reasons given are often ranked by school systems, and it is from this prioritized list that recommendations for remedying the problems associated with teacher flight in a given context result in retention strategies being crafted. A national survey sponsored by the Gates Foundation in conjunction with Scholastic (2009) of more than 40,000 teachers, conducted through online and telephone surveys between March and June 2009, reveals similar reasons for teacher attrition. Among other findings, the data reveal that public school teachers want “supportive leadership,” which “trumps financial incentives” (p. 1). “To retain good teachers,” the report noted, “68% [of teachers surveyed] called supportive leadership ‘absolutely essential,’ while 45% said the same of higher salaries” (p. 2).

Some states like Texas, New York, and North Carolina also publish teacher turnover reports annually, and within the last few years, some national reports have been made available for review. Most of these reports are derived from mega databases; the National Center for Education Statistics, for example, houses such data related to recruitment, retention, and attrition of teachers. Reports created from these data and other such data sources often show numbers and corresponding percentages of teachers who leave the profession within a given timeframe, and they usually offer some reasons associated with teacher attrition and teacher movement. Such reports typically provide

some initial insights into the most current trends of attrition and teacher turnover rates (NCDPI, 2004; NCDPI, 2005; NCES, NCTAF, 2002; NEA, 2002; NEA, 2003).

As recently as 2002, it was shown that there is enough supply of teachers to meet national demands, but it was also asserted that attrition robs the pipeline and ultimately produces extremely high monetary and various tangible costs to school systems, not the least of which is a decline in student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2002). Similarly, Ingersoll (2007), who has continued to study attrition over time as a particular research interest, reported that there are enough teachers available nationally to fill America's vacant classrooms. Ingersoll addresses his claims qualitatively, by addressing both "fact and fiction" graphics of emergent teachers in the pipeline as well as those already serving in classrooms (Ingersoll, 2007). His concerns focus specifically upon the number of educators who have left the profession, for a variety of specified reasons, and he asserts that solving the teacher shortage demands that the profession pay careful attention to retention efforts, especially strategies to target young teachers who seem to be leaving the profession at alarmingly high rates. The second largest factor attributed to the teacher shortage is "lack of support from school administration" (Ingersoll, 2007, p 7). Thus, attrition of the workforce is currently viewed as a larger problem than the seemingly shrinking supply of trained teachers. Similarly, Table 1 demonstrates a growing trend of actual teachers employed in the United States and projects that a significant number will continue to be hired through 2018. Contained within the data is the issue of teacher flight, migration, and attrition.

Examining even more current data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics, which culminates in a tri-yearly publication commissioned by the United States Department of Education, is significant to understand better the nature of novice teachers' reasons for remaining in or leaving the profession. Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton (2006) have interpreted the most recent data available in "Results from the 2004-2005 Teacher Follow-up Survey." Their findings suggest that the number of teacher "stayers, movers, and leavers" (p. 7) increased overall when viewed comparatively over a period of 15 years (1988-2003). Interpretations of this longitudinal data (Table 2) indicate that of the total 3,214,900 public school teachers surveyed who were teaching during the 2003-2004 school year, 8% moved to a different school while another 8% left the profession. Moreover, of those teachers classified as 30 years of age and younger, nearly 15% moved to another school while 9% left the teaching profession. With some fluctuation having occurred over a 15-year period, the total number and corresponding percentages of all "movers" and "leavers" captured through the survey increased from 7.9% to 8.1% and 5.6% to 8.4% respectively (Table 2). Turning to novice teachers alone, defined in this report as those having between 1 and 3 years of experience, 598,300 were studied. Only 71.8% (n=461,100) of beginning teachers remained in their respective school assignments while 14.8% (n=88,600) moved between schools or districts with the remaining 8.1% (n=48,600) leaving teaching (Table 3).

More significantly, Marvel, et al. (2006) delineates the categorical reasons for both "movers" and "leavers" as reported by teachers themselves (Table 4). Of the 11 reasons noted by those teachers who moved to new schools or districts, 32.7% cited

dissatisfaction with workplace conditions as the third highest reason for moving while 37.2% responded as dissatisfied with support from administrators in their previous schools. This reason alone ranked second only to 38.1% of “movers” noting that they found opportunities for what they classified as better teaching assignments, without regard to more specifically defined circumstances within this cause. Similarly, those novices who left teaching also responded with their reasons and motivations (Table 5) for doing so. Of the 12 reasons shown, two of them are immediately significant: 14.6% cited dissatisfaction with teaching as a career, and another 16.0% were dissatisfied with their previous schools or teaching assignments.

This report is significant because it provides information about teacher mobility and attrition among both elementary and secondary school teachers, sampled from across the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The percentages and numbers of teachers who stay, move, or leave, as defined in the report, offer a graphical understanding over time and indicate trends about teachers’ decisions regarding their profession and their work settings.

Two other reports (Sparks, 2002; NCTAF, 2002) equally call for school leaders at all levels to create professional cultures where teachers can “thrive and grow throughout their careers.” The implication is that our schools and their leaders are not poised to support the education goals of today’s schools. It is also clear that teachers are identifying these factors through their leaving the profession. For those who choose to remain in the field of teaching, many of them are seeking schools and communities where



their work is viewed as important and enduring and where resources, both human and material, are readily available and accessible.

Other conclusions can be reached through attrition and retention studies, including some overarching themes about why teachers leave their schools or the profession entirely. Most often, teachers taking flight state that a lack of professionalism, collegiality, and administrative support comprise their reasons for leaving (Bolton, 2002). These reasons rank much higher than low salaries or teachers' perceived ideas about less than adequate benefits. Most analyses indicate that teachers are identifying reasons related to family, personal circumstances, and job dissatisfaction as typical categorical reasons for leaving (Voke, 2002). The latter category – job dissatisfaction – has gained much attention in reports and studies and, indeed, in educational communities in recent years. Many recommendations and conclusions emanating from studies purport that administrators or principals play multiple key roles in reducing teacher turnover, especially for novice teachers (Inman, 2004). Eliminating the attrition rates of so many beginning teachers will surely reduce a large population of teachers who are leaving, especially since 25% to upwards of 50% resign during their first three years of service (Voke, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1998).

### **Principal/Administrative Support**

Many of the proposed remedies for attrition, and indeed even a growing number of specific retention strategies, are centered within the realm of principal or administrative support given to teachers. The attrition data mentioned herein confirms the need for appropriate and structured support, especially for new teachers. While all

teachers need to be and thus feel supported, this is especially necessary for those teachers with less than ten years of service, for it is this group that comprises the vast majority of educators who are engaged in teacher flight (Inman, 2004). It has been stated that quality teaching cannot happen without quality instructional leadership (Menchaca, 2003). Such a belief connotes that all school leaders, and especially principals, must create conditions that provide for an environment that is conducive to both teaching and learning. Work in this area indicates that the order of these proceedings seems to matter most, with an emphasis on the relationship between what principals do first (leading, supporting, and cultivating) and what teachers are then able to do with their students (teaching and facilitating).

A call for generalized support, however, is not enough. Where novice teachers are concerned, principals are specifically called upon to provide leadership such that it results in high quality induction and mentoring programs (Menchaca, 2003). Induction, in particular, is paramount to the success of new educators, with one report indicating that nearly 95% of novice teachers who were nurtured through a high quality induction experience were successful during their initial years in teaching (Odell & Huling, 2000). The results of having followed participants engaged in such a program were strongly compelling, such that 80% of novice teachers who experienced this type of induction remained even beyond five years of teaching (Wilkinson, 1994). The key to establishing such a program, notwithstanding its high quality components and ultimate effectiveness, is the support of building-level principals. Enthusiasm for and success related to these

types of programs rest with principals who possess a specific belief in and support for assisting novice teachers (Menchaca, 2003).

Some specific support efforts offered by principals to special educators may be instructive for all teachers, regardless of their areas of subject expertise or licensure. Teacher burnout and attrition have been cited as occurring at epidemic rates in the field of special education (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). A fairly recent annual attrition rate of special educators was estimated to be between 8% and 10% nationally (Whitaker, 2000). It is also believed that teachers of exceptional children are leaving the field at higher rates than their regular classroom counterparts (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002), and generally, since the mid 1990s, special educators have been in short supply across the country (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Terbanian, 1998). When teased out as a specific licensure group from other subject/discipline teachers, exceptional children's educators cited that they leave teaching due to a variety of factors, including large caseloads, burdensome paperwork, problems with student behavior, and difficulties related to their regular education colleagues. They also identified concerns with administrators and parents. It is believed that this group of teachers exits due to a combination of these factors (Wasburn-Moses, 2005).

While a few of these reasons are germane to the world of special education teachers, several of them are applicable to all teaching disciplines. The role of the school principal receives much attention in studies that deal with attempts to understand more fully and subsequently reduce the attrition rate of special educators. For example, a positive notation of principal support was deemed necessary by more than 600 general

and special education teachers with regard to these particular teachers' senses of well-being and feelings of overall safety and security in their respective work (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994). Principals are also credited with increasing retention rates among special educators by engaging meaningfully in the following roles: prioritizing, collaborating, being personally supportive, handpicking mentors, and emphasizing continued learning (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Thus, it is implicit that principals create the capacity for teachers to feel supported and valued in these and in other ways. To do so, principals could engage in specific efforts, including offering assistance to mediate factors related to discipline and behavior management and perceived difficult parental conferences and interactions. Principals must find ways to foster collegial environments where teachers and administrators work together toward common goals and where competition and confrontation are significantly minimized (Littrell et al, 1994).

Principals and administrators must work carefully with teachers, especially novices, to match them to mentors who have high rates of success in the classroom, who are close in proximity, who exhibit trustworthiness and loyalty, and who are not charged with conducting formal evaluations of their mentees (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). It is also important to note that "teachers who felt they were provided with opportunities to learn on the job tended to be less likely to leave" (Gerstsen, et al., 2001, p. 559). Inherent in this statement is the notion that principals again have a responsibility to create the capacity for staff to learn, to explore, and to match teachers' needs with high quality professional learning opportunities across a variety of venues.

## **School Culture Defined**

As far back as the 1930s, it has been argued that every school has a culture of its own. Waller (1932), an educational sociologist, noted that schools have a set of rituals and folkways as well as a moral code that shapes their behaviors and relationships. He said at that time, “Parents and students have always detected the special, hard-to-pinpoint esprit of schools” (p. 21). Building upon Waller’s and others’ work over the years, Peterson and Deal (2002) have attempted to quantify and therefore define school culture as a conscious, yet intuitive, entity that is indigenous to every school. Loosely defined, school culture can be interpreted as the unwritten rules, the unstated expectations, and the underground folkways found within educational institutions (Deal & Peterson, 1999, 2009).

Culture specifically connects to the larger and even intricate details associated with expectations, norms, and rituals found within schools. All members of any school begin to understand rather immediately upon their induction into the setting what it takes to become an accepted member of the organization. These stakeholders, ranging from teachers, students, staff, and even community volunteers, most often size up the cultural elements associated within their assigned schools, and they either assimilate rather easily or find their membership to be difficult and perhaps even strange. This occurs because of the personal experiences and worldviews that each member brings into such a setting. Teachers and students in particular find themselves questioning whether the environment of the school measures up to their own expectations and if it equates to their own notions

of purpose, motivation, and personal mission. Defined in vernacular terminology, school culture is simply the way that things are done in a school.

Seeking more formal definitions of school culture, one can turn to Peterson and Deal's work in this field. For many educators, they note, the terms "climate and ethos" accurately describe the organizational phenomenon known as school culture. "Climate emphasizes the feeling and contemporary tone of the school, the feeling of the relationships, and the morale of the place" (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 9). Exploring the concept further, these researchers assert that the term culture "best denotes the complex elements of values, traditions, language, and purpose" (p. 9). Additionally, "Culture exists in the deeper elements of a school: the unwritten rules and assumptions, the combination of rituals and traditions, the array of symbols and artifacts, the special language and phrasing that staff and students use, and the expectations for change and learning that saturate the school's world" (p. 10).

### **The Importance of School Culture**

For a number of years, school culture as a concept was rather nebulously understood, and its impact upon school performance and meaningful reform remained largely underestimated. It is important, as a result, to trace a brief history of influential factors over the last few decades that relegated the concept of school culture as disconnected from the effective learning and teaching understandings that continuing research efforts in a new century have provided.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Levine and Lezotte (1990) began to study unusually effective schools and determined that intentionally created climates and ethos

were conducive to learning. Specifically, they noted that schools that had a clear mission focused on student learning fostered higher expectations for those students and that this, in turn, focused the work of faculty members on creating conditions related to enhancing learning. The correlates of effective schools that emerged from the work of Levine and Lezotte (1990) included strong leadership at the building level, high expectations, a shared sense of mission and purpose, monitoring student achievement, safe and orderly environments, and the use of effective instruction by teachers. These elements began to define the distinctive characteristics of particular schools where attitudes, habits, and beliefs permeated the culture.

In many ways, the research by Levine and Lezotte, which later came to be known as the effective schools movement, helped to defy earlier research findings. In particular, the work of Coleman et al. (1966), often referred to as “The Coleman Report,” largely promoted the belief that student learning was predictable by and contingent upon students’ background characteristics, including their socio-economic status. Not surprising at all is the fact that the ideology pervading this massive report, delivered to Congress in the 1960s, shaped much of the thinking of policy makers and educators alike during those years, with both educational reform efforts and federal programs, like Title I, linked directly to the findings of the research.

As aptly noted by Czerniak (2007), a former editor of the *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, who commented in a review of effective schools and teacher quality research related to science teacher education, “...student background variables explain a portion of the variance in student learning...it is apparent that the Coleman study focused

primarily at the school level, while ignoring potential teacher effects...” (p. 345). The bases of such validated statements made in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are derived from continuing research regarding effective schools in the late 1990s. Sanders and Horn (1998) concluded after conducting much research across the 1990s that teacher quality accounts for a significant difference in student learning. In particular they noted, “Teacher effects on student achievement have been found to be both additive and cumulative with little evidence that subsequent effective teachers can offset the effects of ineffective ones (Sanders & Horn, 1998, p. 247).

These findings suggest, in part, that the type of culture in which teachers work has a profound impact upon their continued and perpetual readiness, preparation, and performance to teach all students at high levels. Expectations, established norms, beliefs, values, attitudes, and overall working conditions either enhance or detract from a given school’s ability to provide and guarantee that all students will be academically successful. Thus, the culture of a school is inextricably tied to and greatly influences the learning-teaching landscape.

While much has been written about the impact that school culture plays in the overall arena of school, school district, student, and faculty successes, some major educational reform efforts have continued largely to ignore the significance and impact of school culture as a vehicle to internally transform educational institutions known as “school.” Peterson and Deal (2002) addressed this status of affairs less than ten years ago in the following remarks:



A great deal of attention is currently being paid to making schools better. Policymakers want to know why we cannot get schools to change more quickly and be more responsive to students' learning needs. The favored response has been to tighten up structures and increase accountability, beef up curriculum standards, test student performance, and provide rewards to schools that measure up and sanctions to those that fall short. In the short term, these solutions may pressure schools to change peripheral practices and raise test scores. In the long term, such external demands will never rival the power of cultural expectations, motivations, and values (p. 7).

These researchers have also concluded that school culture plays a central role in the exemplary or dismal performance of any school. Without a strong, positive culture, "schools flounder and die" (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 7). A school's culture, whether positive and healthy or negative and unhealthy, serves as a central tenet of its existence, running perhaps like a thread throughout the organization. This woven "thread" is not always immediately visible, but its existence is undeniable. School culture is built upon norms, folkways, values, and traditions, and organizational performance is likely both improved and enhanced through a shared system that includes "passion, purpose, and a sense of spirit" (p. 7).

Schools largely fall into one of two categories: those that have strong, positive cultures, which are rich in purpose and abundant in tradition and meaning; and those that are unhealthy, negative, and perhaps "toxic," a term coined by Deal and Peterson (1999). These types of institutions are barely surviving, and there is little or perhaps even no commitment on the part of leaders, faculty, students, or external constituents to improve. This latter type of school organization is meagerly existing, often adrift without educational purpose and drive to accomplish its mission or improve.

Understanding the importance of school culture is to know that cultural characteristics influence almost everything that happens in a school. These largely unwritten liturgies of social expectations “influence and shape the ways in which teachers, students, and administrators think, feel and act” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 9). Some examples of these social expectations and values found within a school might include the following: Is improvement important? What is the school’s response when students do not learn or perform well? Do faculty truly believe that all students can learn and at high levels? Do faculty and staff see their daily work as a job or as a calling? Are collaboration and teamwork championed beliefs in the school? Finally, how well do faculty members support their colleagues, both new and veteran ones, who may propose innovative ideas? These and many other practices begin to give insight into the type of culture that a school embodies. Faculty relationships, leader behaviors and practices, and student, parental, and community responses offer much insight about the culture of a school.

Deal and Peterson (1999) further assert that “every aspect of a school is shaped, formed, and molded by underlying symbolic elements” (p. 10) associated with the culture of a school. When faculty, and particularly school leaders, continually engage in study and reflection about their particular contexts, they possess the power both to champion and to reinforce cultural patterns that are positive; equally, they possess the ability to transform cultural elements that are negative and which often keep a school from accomplishing its core mission – to educate all students at a high level. The importance of school culture, therefore, can be neither ignored nor underestimated. As Deal and

Peterson so aptly point out, schools must “nourish cultures where every teacher can make a difference and every child can learn and where there are passion and a commitment to designing and promoting the absolute best that is possible” (p. 8).

### **The Significance of School Culture upon the Retention of Novice Teachers**

The significance of understanding school culture relates directly to the support of or lack of support to novice teachers as they take their places as new faculty members in schools each year. When examining the notion of administrative support or lack of support as a cause for novice teacher attrition, a direct correlation exists between school leaders who create and maintain healthy school cultures and how they understand that these cultures influence new faculty members’ perceptions of themselves and the work in which they engage each day. Since there is not much information in the current literature that definitively describes what lack of administrative support is and how it specifically plays into the decisions that novice teachers choose either to remain in or leave a school setting, one must look for possible indicators within the school environment and culture that may point to answers regarding this issue. Specifically, it is important to examine principals and other administrative personnel within a school from the positionality of their responsibilities to create and maintain positive, healthy school cultures where adults work - places where they are either happy and productive or unhappy and largely disengaged from their work. No doubt, the state of teachers’ feelings about how they perceive the workplace becomes a direct factor in whether or not they continue to choose to work in such a venue or even remain in the profession entirely.

## **The Impact of Leadership upon School Climate and Retention of Novice Teachers**

Because Deal and Peterson (1999) have written numerous books and articles on the impact of school culture, I have chosen to draw largely upon their insights and understandings to correlate the matters of school culture and novice teacher attrition. These two educational researchers have individually and collectively engaged in a variety of studies over the last two decades, the results of which now help to define how school culture is assessed as either positive and healthy or as toxic and therefore largely as dysfunctional. First and foremost, Deal and Peterson (1999) make it quite clear that school administrators have direct responsibilities to read the culture, assess it, and either reinforce or transform the culture. They also assert that all school leaders must know what is really happening in their respective settings. Admittedly, this is somewhat complex and even difficult to attain at times given the nature of communication and the difficulties associated with communication processes, especially among groups of people and specifically within schools and educational settings. This perpetual conundrum vacillates between what is perceived to be happening and what is really going on in a given organization.

## **Understanding the Role of Culture in a School**

If one accepts Bower's (1996) interpretation that school culture can be informally defined as "the way we do things around here" (p. 126), then such a definition really speaks to the specific actions, statements, treatment, norms, values, and beliefs that can be found in a school. This is where the formal interpretation of Bower's statement intersects with students and personnel. Students themselves have long been able to

define the unwritten rules and ways that business is conducted within a school; they know rather immediately whether a school is a positive place where students' needs and feelings are either affirmed and championed or ignored and devalued. Likewise, teachers can describe and seemingly know inherently if a school setting is a positive or negative one. New teachers, in particular, like new students, generally can sum up the culture of a school within days or even within hours of becoming part of the setting. Peterson and Deal (2002) confirm this when they assert, "Staff members who walk into a new school also pick it [culture] up immediately... Within the first hour of a new assignment, teachers begin to sift through the deep silt of expectations, norms, and rituals to learn what it means to become an accepted member of the school" (p. 8). Additionally, new teachers and students alike are continually assessing and can thus describe the typical behavior of the school, the set of beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes held by the members of the school, and the patterns of behaviors, thoughts, speech, and other indicators of the organization known as "school."

### **Characteristics Associated with Positive School Cultures**

Fyans and Maehr (1990), along with Peterson and Deal (2002), have delineated some of the indicators of a positive, professional culture that adults in such settings would experience and be able to describe. In short, they "feel" and experience these factors and therefore act in congruent ways that are consistent with their feelings and the culture that they experience. Positive indicators of school culture include strong shared beliefs among faculty that collegiality and improvement are norms within the environment. Faculty and staff members might also cite that learning, achievement, and

students' personal, social, and emotional needs take precedence over faculty members' personal desires, and they would likely hold both individual and collective beliefs that all students can and will learn. These are initially positive indicators that a healthy, professional culture exists within the school setting. Additionally, as noted by Peterson and Deal (2002), such a culture would support and reinforce collaborative problem solving, planning, and data-driven decision making. These definable factors ultimately foster productivity, which leads to the affirmation of employees' work. How they perceive and thus "feel" about these matters are of great importance with regard to the culture of their organizations.

### **The Role of the Educational Leader in School Culture**

A major tenet within this type of culture is highly effective and often charismatic leadership, which both creates and affirms such a strong organizational ideology (Fyans & Maehr, 1990). The role of the leader(s) cannot be underscored enough in such settings with regard to creating and maintaining a positive school culture. When contrasted to toxic and negative cultures, clearly the leadership is a key piece where differences are evident. In toxic settings, leadership is either unaware of or perhaps not concerned with factors such as a lack of shared purpose, anti-student sentiments, negativity, individualism, mediocrity, fragmented relationships, and overall defeat and failure. In such settings, staff members exhibit no real sense of commitment to purpose or mission, and they often show little motivation to improve. Conflicts of all types abound among all of the membership in such settings, including students, teachers, parents, administrators, and support staff. Consequently, negative cultures develop from these and other

symptoms found within such toxic settings. Moreover, leadership in these venues is obviously lacking in that there is little to no attendance to these matters, or there is no perceived or real help offered for staff members to overcome such adversities. What is important in a school gets attention; thus, we cannot discount that what principals themselves consider important or unimportant sends a strong and clear message to staff and students alike. The cycle, it seems, is perpetuated, with negativity promoting more negativity, without any provision made to change the course of the organization. As noted by Peterson and Deal (2002), "...over time, the culture starts to reinforce its own negativity" (p. 89). It is important to acknowledge here that schools may not necessarily be universally toxic; rather, they may contain "pockets" of negativity, resulting in a partially toxic culture. It is the express responsibility of leaders to learn where these pockets exist and why they seemingly persist. This type of situation requires leaders to assess just how toxic the workplace is and to develop strategies for overcoming negativism. Most often, this process results in leaders working in very direct ways with personnel to overcome such a status.

It is clear, then, that while school culture may seemingly have a life of its own, appearing to operate perhaps as an entity separate and apart from leadership, school leaders can and do have a direct impact on shaping the culture of a school, either positively or negatively. Schein (1985) stated nearly twenty-five years ago that one of the key tasks of school leaders is to influence and shape school culture. He noted that this is accomplished through a myriad of daily interactions, careful reflection, and conscious and calculated efforts on the part of the leader (Schein, 1985). It is of

paramount importance that school-based administrators understand that their actions are noticed and interpreted by others as what is truly important in the organization. A principal who acts with care and concern for others, for example, is far more likely to develop a positive school culture where comparable shared values exist. Similarly, a principal who has little time for others and fails to cultivate meaningful relationships places his or her explicit stamp of approval on selfish and guarded behaviors, promoting a disregard of others. This often results in reciprocal fragmented relationships that are ultimately characterized as distrustful and valueless within the organization. Thus, the school's culture is defined in part by the actions or inactions of its leader.

In addition to modeling, Deal and Peterson (1999) suggest that "principals should work to develop shared visions--rooted in history, values, beliefs--of what the school should be, hire compatible staff, face conflict rather than avoid it, and use story-telling to illustrate shared values" (p. 89). Finally, and perhaps most important in developing a positive school culture, principals must nurture the traditions, ceremonies, rituals, and symbols that already exist and which express and reinforce positive school culture. Giving affirmation of and credence to these elements is critical and correlates highly to positive and healthy school cultures.

### **Novice Teachers: Assimilating into the School Culture**

Given both the understandings of school culture and the responsibilities placed upon school leaders for fostering a positive school culture within their respective settings, it is important to turn to the novice teachers who enter a school setting for the first time. How do they interpret a school's culture and its climate? What are the effects upon them



as employees and as people who soon become either positive or negative forces in a school setting? How do they continually question if their work is valued and whether or not they feel affirmed in the setting in which they are placed? The answers to these initial questions promote even more questions, particularly as they relate to the interactions between school administrators and new teachers. If one accepts the premise that leaders have direct responsibilities for fostering and nurturing a positive school culture, then one must automatically include the relationships and interactions that principals have with their newest employees – novice teachers. Since these new hires are assimilated into an existing culture, they become immediate members of such school cultures and environments. For those who experience a positive, nurturing, and overall supportive setting, the likelihood of their success as well as their being retained grows exponentially. In such places, new teachers' ideas are valued, and those around them feel responsible for their success and overall well being. They are genuinely welcomed to the team, and they immediately feel a sense of ownership, pride, belongingness, and happiness in their new work settings.

Based upon my own countless experiences in schools and through observations of both effective and ineffective schools, I, too, attribute that much of the success of young teachers is due largely to the support that they both receive and feel from their colleagues as well as from their leaders and supervisors. Peterson and Deal (2002) affirm this by relating the story of new teachers in a given school who felt affirmed as members of a professional community. They cited that a neighboring district attempted to recruit successful first and second year teachers by offering higher salaries and new

opportunities. Because of their connectedness and sense of loyalty to their assigned schools, due primarily to highly positive relationships and feelings of value and worth, these teachers turned down such opportunities. To summarize the reasons for these new teachers' decisions, Peterson and Deal (2002) concluded the following: "If the rituals and traditions, ceremonies and celebrations, and practices and behaviors build a sense of community, then the staff, students, and community will identify with the school and feel committed to the purposes and relationships there. Culture builds commitment" (p. 11).

When difficulties arise, which is inherently interwoven in the work of new teachers, these particular employees must feel and experience that a highly effective support system is in place, whereby their personal feelings about such matters are viewed as important. Moreover, responses to their difficulties must be met with shared strategies and collegially-based responses to such difficulties regardless of whether these difficulties lie in student or parent interactions. Principals and teacher leaders in such settings must also perform constant checks on their new hires, and they should genuinely seek opportunities beyond the normal call of duty to forge personal and professional relationships with their new employees. School leaders themselves often provide direct support, and where positive school cultures exist, they always ensure that there are multiple means of assistance offered by other employees in the building and those within close proximity of novice teachers (Peterson & Deal, 2002). Again, principals communicate this sense of importance in a variety of ways through both formal and informal means. If the needs of new employees are important to the principal, then they become important in the eyes of the surrounding faculty and staff members.

## **Effects of Toxic Settings on Novice Teachers**

When a negative or toxic culture exists, often new teachers and their plethora of needs for support are not even on the principal's radar screen. If one accepts the notion that modeling and communicating by principals translates into what is important in the work setting, then one must realize that a lack of personal response and attention by the principal and the creation of a timely and meaningful response system promotes the belief among new teachers that they are in deep waters without the ability to swim successfully. Surely they must wonder how others have survived being new in such settings, and they must feel overwhelmed by all of the issues that continually confront them in the first days, weeks, and even months of their arrival in a new school. Quickly, they learn whether or not the "system" in the school is either open or closed, and in cases of a closed-system school, new teachers likely shut down, choose not to communicate with colleagues or administrators, and retreat into their own worlds, no doubt experiencing high levels of anxiety, frustration, and isolation. Peterson and Deal (2002) offer that staff members who work in negative or despondent cultures have "either fragmented purposes or none at all, feel no sense of commitment to the mission of the school, and have little motivation to improve" (p. 11). Surely new teachers in toxic settings lose their sense of purpose, likely their motivation, and perhaps their willingness to engage fully in their tasks. While most teachers enter the profession fully committed to make a difference in the lives of their students, a general lack of support, including formal structural support efforts, can easily yield despondency, a lack of enthusiasm, and even withdrawal from earlier commitments.

Setting a tone for support or nonsupport is clearly an administrative matter; again, what the school principal pays attention to is what others view as important and worthy of attention in the school setting. It is clear, then, that principals are paramount to supporting new teachers, both directly, formally, informally, and through a myriad of efforts designed to provide appropriate scaffolding and support for new teachers' well being and their ultimate success as educators. The degree to which school leaders assess, shape, define, and re-define the culture in their schools ultimately affects the school, its members, and its overall success. The matter of whether or not culture can be shaped and influenced by leadership has been a continual question since school culture research efforts began. Peterson and Deal (2002) offer a definitive answer, as follows: "Although school culture is deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of staff, students, and parents, it can be shaped by the work of leaders" (p. 12). Similarly, Schein (1985) said, "One of the key tasks of school leaders is shaping culture through myriad daily interactions, careful reflection, and conscious efforts" (p. 29).

### **Perceived Gaps Between Theories and Current Practice**

While current research includes much about the direct correlation between principals' actions, their dispositions, and teachers' responses, the category of "lack of support" identified by some exiting teachers is still nebulously defined. Knowing more precisely and definitively what actually constitutes administrative "support" and "lack of support" from teachers' viewpoints can further help to inform the knowledge base and should influence the resulting practice of principals, including the preparation of and continuing professional development needed for principals as they seek to build

particular capacities that foster and sustain collegial working relationships with teachers. It is at this point where retention efforts may be specifically designed in conjunction with concepts of “support” to reduce attrition rates of all teachers who cite “lack of support” as a reason for leaving. Such findings may also be equally instructive for teachers who, as professional educators, may gain new awareness about how perceived support may be somewhat different from particular actions and interactions that could ultimately characterize and define actual “support” extended to them by principals. Ultimately, the goal of extending the current understandings and findings relative to this topic is to provide new knowledge and understandings about “support” such that resulting actions and efforts may reduce negative attrition rates of novice teachers.

To delve more deeply into this level of understanding and perception, there is a need for researchers to interact with teachers who feel that they are not supported well and who consequently leave the profession and those who sought teaching jobs in places where they felt supported. It is the teachers’ views that are most important here, not the principals who already believe that they are supportive in many ways. Capturing teachers’ perceptions about principals’ efforts of support or the lack thereof can arm those responsible for authoring retention efforts with powerful data that could help to shape and craft meaningful retention strategies. With root causes of some retention problems clearly identified, resulting work in retention may be better focused and perhaps serve to lessen significantly the attrition rate for the reason of “lack of support,” especially among novice teachers.

## **Summary**

It is clear from the review of literature presented herein that the varied roles performed by principals in all schools are critical to the successes that both teachers and students ultimately experience. It is also evident that while principals may not work with novice teachers as mentors on a daily basis, they are charged, however, with the responsibility of creating conditions, climates, and cultures that are healthy and which foster conditions of success. Based upon the foregoing literature review, it cannot be denied that the professional growth and success of teachers significantly impact the academic success that students will experience. Thus, principals must create systems and structures of support for all teachers, but especially novices, so that they may develop and flourish professionally and even personally in order to positively affect student achievement. Creating supportive conditions for both learning and teaching is directly related to the overall culture in a given school. As is pointed out in the literature, principals are instrumental in shaping schools' culture, of which support for teachers is one major component.

Finally, it is important to make explicit here that the intent of this literature review has been to show "gaps or bias in existing knowledge, thus providing a rationale for a grounded theory study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 179). As May (1986) also points out, the literature review for a grounded theory study "neither provides key concepts nor suggests hypotheses as it does in hypothetico-deductive research" (May, 1986, p. 149). Thus, the information presented herein has been categorized and reviewed to provide a basis for

conducting a study that is designed to generate new theory about “lack of support” of principals as defined through the lived experiences of novice teachers.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Design**

The findings generated by the review of literature regarding teacher retention, based upon perceptions of administrative/principal support, have outlined a rather tenuous perspective of how teachers currently define support or lack of support by their principals as a primary reason for leaving the profession or their assigned professional work settings. It appears that many individual teachers hold their own respective perceptions and definitions of what it means to be supported, all of which remain largely unknown to other teachers, administrators, the educational leadership community, and educational researchers. I assert that administrative support may be partially defined by teachers in certain content/licensure areas, too. For example, in the review of literature, the support or lack of it given by principals to exceptional children's teachers seems to offer a beginning point to understand more intently and holistically what support is and perhaps what it is not. To know and define what lack of principal support means, is – conversely - to know and therefore define “support” by them. Given this belief, this study sought to inquire more deeply into the thinking and decision-making processes of some selected novice teachers across a variety of public school contexts and licensure areas.

The method of delving into these issues surrounding teachers' beliefs were



determined to be achieved best through qualitative inquiry. A qualitative approach seemed particularly appropriate and necessary since the literature really confirms that educators, researchers, and scholars know only categorically and very generally that some teachers leave due to a “lack of support,” without knowing what that really means. Moreover, the scholarly work published to date in the areas of teacher attrition and retention does not provide specificity for understanding “lack of support.” It seems that any undertaking, then, should be qualitatively based to explore the actual definitions that teachers apply to “lack of support.” Consequently, this study was initiated in part for the purpose of compelling administrators and principals to act more intentionally and perhaps even behave differently (administratively) based upon knowledge gained from the findings in this study, which are discussed in detail and in tandem with recommendations in Chapter 6. At the very least, with regard to this topic, it should now be recognized that the actions and behaviors associated with support of teachers by administrators should not be based upon generalized thought or blind perceptivity, especially with regard to retaining educators.

To understand the perceptions and beliefs by novice teachers, this study was limited to defining “lack of support” of principals as described and depicted by novice teachers, which specifies instructors with three years or less of experience. I investigated and analyzed, in qualitatively appropriate ways, teachers’ perceptions of principal support. It was important to deconstruct what selected beginning teachers thought, believed, and experienced regarding principal support within their respective school settings. Gaining this information, I believed, might help to lead the way for better understandings among

professionals and allow for further study in the arena of teacher retention, perhaps guiding some new retention strategies that may be implemented to better retain novice teachers. I decided to study novice teachers who both left the profession entirely and who left their school settings to find other supportive environments. These participants exited from their assignments sometime during their first through third years of experience in a given public school. Similarly, these individuals were ones who also cited their reasons for exiting as “lack of support” from their principals and/or administrators.

### **Research Questions**

The following five research questions were crafted to guide this study, which sought to define “lack of support” from principals and administrators, as perceived and reported by specific teachers who left the profession or who exited their schools in search of new districts or schools where principal/administrative support was perceived to be high:

1. What can we learn from the stories of exiting teachers who define their experiences as ones characterized by “lack of support” from principals and/or administrators?
2. How do exiting K-12 public school teachers, who hold a valid teaching license and who have 1 – 3 years of experience, describe/define “lack of support” by principals or administrators as a reason for leaving?
3. Do interactions between novice teachers and other internal or external supervisors/evaluators influence these teachers’ views and beliefs about

support or lack of support by principals or administrators?

4. How can knowing what exiting novice teachers define as “lack of support” by principals or administrators assist in creating more supportive environments, ultimately reducing the number of beginning teachers who exit the profession or their currently assigned school/district?
5. How do teachers understand “school culture” as a paradigm that informs the way that they see/view principal support?

### **Overview of Methodology**

The preferred qualitative research method employed for this study was grounded theory. Because this study sought to develop theory around the notion of administrative support, and not test an existing theory, this particular tradition of inquiry seemed most appropriate. I believed initially that the process of generating or discovering theory would best emanate from the lived experiences and views of several subjects who themselves had experienced a perceived lack of support by their principals. My hypothesis at the outset was that this inductive model of theory development would best provide a significantly different way to understand and subsequently define “lack of administrative/principal support” than is currently known. To define more specifically the concept of “lack of support” might also yield further understandings about the converse – the meaning of “support” as perceived, understood and experienced by beginning teachers. I determined that it was particularly important to deconstruct the experiences of those teachers who had in their own minds experienced a lack of support but who sought professional teaching venues that they classified as supportive

environments. Equally important was to select some participants who had left the profession entirely for the express reason of “lack of administrative support” as indicated by these teachers.

Multiple interviews were administered to nine participants between February and June 2010. Various questions were asked to two different groups of participants; three of the nine subjects had left the profession entirely due to a lack of support, and the remaining six had intentionally changed teaching venues (schools or districts) because of their beliefs that they were in unsupportive environments.

### **Research Participants**

Undertaking a grounded theory study prescribed that much data be collected from several novice participants. Appendix F delineates the research participants with regard to their profession status, number of years in non-supportive settings, and pseudonyms that subjects themselves chose as unique identifiers for this research. Six (6) subjects were chosen to form the first group. These were currently practicing novice teachers who left their original school settings and/or district assignments due to a perceived lack of administrative/principal support. These six teachers have remained in the profession. An additional three participants who left the profession entirely after their first, second, or third years of teaching for the reason ascribed as lack of principal support, formed the second group. While the number of participants in these two groups did not demonstrate an equal balance, I decided, by design, that more depth in understanding, and thus a greater possibility of generating substantive theory around the topic, might be gained from those subjects who had experienced a lack of support but who then transferred to

other locations to find support. Ultimately, I concluded that the individuals in these two groupings would be able to speak to their experiences from two diverse perspectives regarding support, thus offering both a dual-pronged perspective and clarity about what support entails and what lack of support means.

All participants were chosen from several public Local Education Agencies (LEAs) across a defined geographic region of North Carolina. Eight public school districts, ranging in differing size, demographics, educational philosophy, and types of locale were selected. All research subjects represented one of the chosen districts included in this study. A description of each district, also identified uniquely by pseudonyms, may be found in Chapter 4. To generate an initial list of possible participants who had experienced a lack of principal support, I sought the assistance of many colleagues who were building-level or district-based administrators in the selected school systems to identify such potential subjects. It was my hope to have several subjects from whom to choose, as I felt compelled to make sure that participants represented elementary, middle, and secondary levels and that, holistically, the research group represented varied age, gender, ethnic, and cultural characteristics. A mini portrait of each participant is also included in Chapter 4. A lay summary (Appendix B) and oral presentation (Appendix C) were used to inform potential participants about the nature of the study, and an approved Consent Form (Appendix A) was procured from each willing participant prior to collecting any data.

## **Data Collection**

Individual interviews were conducted three times with each participant. Following the completion of these sessions, two focus group interview sessions, held in two geographic locations across the identified regions for participants' convenience, were also conducted. These individual interviews and focus groups provided significant data, with more than 60 hours of data being transcribed. Utilizing a standard inquiry protocol developed for all subjects' first interviews, the initial interview questions (Appendix D) consisted of open-ended and some specific questions. The open-ended questions were crafted in keeping with what Fetterman (1989) terms as the "discovery phase" of qualitative research (p. 54). The initial interview for each participant lasted a minimum of one hour, with most extending to nearly two hours. All interview sessions were captured via data recorder and then transcribed in a word-for-word format by a professional transcriptionist.

After studying and analyzing transcripts, field notes, and researcher reflections carefully and multiple times for initial themes, properties, and categories of information, subsequent interviews were conducted with individual participants, with most of these interviews lasting upwards of two hours. As a matter of research design, I used findings from each subject's previous interviews to build upon participant's prior responses and to develop both continuing and new conversational points through some pre-planned inquiry and dialogue. These subsequent interview protocols were designed specifically to generate more information about the lived experiences of participants who had experienced the concept of lack of administrative support. Such an individualized

approach aided me in engaging participants at a deeper level based upon their respective lived experiences during each successive interview. This intentional practice, I believe, allowed me to explore participants' own experiences at continually deeper levels throughout the data collection process and thus enriched both the data that was collected and the resulting analyses and findings.

Throughout each interview, I made written notes, often including key words, phrases, and short quotes from participants themselves in my raw notes. The jottings contained what seemed to be significant points made in each interview and assisted me later to write both formal descriptive and reflective field notes. As noted by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), writing descriptive field notes helped me to construct "rich data that [was] well-endowed with good description and dialogue relevant to what occurred at the setting" and allowed "pieces of evidence, with the clues needed to put together" accounts "to make analytical sense" about what I was studying and learning (p. 114). Immediately following each interview, I also utilized the data recorder to capture my own reflections and to make verbal notes to myself. In addition to writing reflective memos, the voice-recorded researcher reflections were transcribed and offered yet another way to capture "the more subjective side of my journey" through this study (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, p. 114). Likewise, these particular memos were used during the data analysis process as shown in Figure 1.

The focus group sessions that I conducted provided an opportunity for participants to share likenesses and differences in their collective stories and lived experiences that had occurred in non-supportive school settings. Holding these group

sessions further provided me an opportunity to judge where additional individual conversations or follow-up sessions with selected participants were necessary to achieve more depth, to gain clarity of meanings and statements made, to explore any new topics or ideas that emerged, and to check for data saturation. Having conducted multiple interviews and focus group sessions, I determined that I had reached a point of data redundancy as subsequent interviews were only confirming data that I had already collected. This occurred most often during the third interview sessions.

During one early stage of this study, I entertained the idea of observing and even interviewing principals and administrators in schools who were reported by participants to be both “supportive” and “non-supportive.” I believed that including principals could strengthen the quality of the data and aid in data analysis processes and influence findings, but I determined upon careful reflection and professional advice that this approach was not in keeping with the intended purpose of the study – to examine, deconstruct, and analyze the lived experiences of novice teachers who, through their own stories, would generate theory about what lack of administrative support is from teachers’ own experiences. Thus, I ultimately chose not to interview principals since I was more interested in the teachers’ viewpoints, perceptions, and definitions of what administrative support is and is not as defined by teachers themselves.

### **Data Analysis**

The data gleaned from the nine research participants were carefully analyzed using standard protocol elements for grounded theory as suggested largely by Creswell (1998) and particularly the methods and procedural steps outlined by Strauss and Corbin



(1990). Prior to the commencement of this study, I constructed a two-phased step-by-step data collection and analysis plan (Figures 1 and 2). Following some revisions along the way, these two documents carefully guided both the data collection and analysis processes as sequentially demonstrated in Figures 1 and 2. I was cognizant, as suggested by Patton (2002), that my qualitative design needed to “remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of the study.” “The design,” he noted, “should remain emergent, even after data collection begins” (p. 255). This was particularly important to consider while conducting this grounded theory study. As data emerged and as the initial analysis processes began, I found it necessary to make some adjustments to the order by which I would analyze data, especially in Phase II as shown in Figure 2. An explication of each step is offered below to provide the rationale and the specific details related to both the conception of the study and particularly the resulting procedures used throughout to analyze data and generate substantive theory.

Once transcripts were available for review, I began the open coding phase of analysis as indicated in Figure 1. Specifically, I read through transcripts carefully and multiple times, looking for initial categories of information, a process recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This step allowed me to get a feel for significant themes and sub-themes that emerged initially. Continually performing open coding also allowed me to investigate for significant differences and any commonalities that were emerging between participants’ accounts of their respective experiences. Additionally, I reviewed the numerous marginal notes that I had made in the transcripts and began to review both descriptive field notes and reflective memos to yield other initial findings. This process

led to employing the constant comparative approach wherein I was able to saturate the identified categories with instances and examples that represented a given category. I color-coded transcripts to identify themes, sub-themes, and any outlying findings. I also identified properties during this phase. As defined by Creswell (1998), these are units of information that can be “subdivided, which provide the broad dimensions for a given category” (p. 242). Strauss and Corbin (1990) further define properties as “the attributes or characteristics pertaining to a category” (p. 61). Given the vast data analyzed, and because of the complexity and sheer number of categories and properties that emanated from this process, these are not listed here, but many of the properties that formed the four major categories in this study are demonstrated as examples in Figure 3. They are discussed as relational to the overall findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

I was careful to read and re-read a number of times each participant’s multiple transcripts and my own accompanying field, descriptive, and reflective sets of notes to check either for new information that had emerged in a successive interview or for indicators of data saturation as shown at the bottom of Figure 1. Thus, Phase I of analysis was repeated over and over when interview transcriptions were available for review. Once I determined that I was no longer finding new information to add to the understanding of a category, I declared that data saturation had occurred. This process was in keeping with Creswell’s (1998) and Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) definitions of “saturation” as noted in their respective qualitative work.

At this stage of the analysis process, an initial data base, developed throughout open coding phases, began to be reduced to a smaller set of themes or categories.

According to Creswell (1998), this is where identified properties are placed on a continuum and examined for the wide extremes that they may represent under their respective identified categories. Additionally, Creswell (1998) proposes that this is where “the smallest unit of information is analyzed in grounded theory research” (p. 240). Similarly, Strauss and Corbin (1990) label this as the act of “dimensionalizing” or arranging the data on a continuum; this is again demonstrated as an example in Figure 3, and provides a visual representation of the data. It is important to note here that I determined and therefore labeled properties via “in-vivo codes” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 160). Such codes were initially defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) when an investigator “uses the exact words of the interviewees to form the names for the properties...they are ‘catchy’ and immediately draw the attention of the reader” (p. 69). I considered this to be an appropriate practice since I ultimately wanted the theory and all of its supporting components and evidences to be advanced by and thus have emanated from participants’ own stories and experiences.

Having followed very diligently the sequential steps outlined in Phase I of Analysis (Figure 1), the analysis process advanced to Phase II as delineated in Figure 2. Armed with an initial set of categories and their related properties, I identified four of the categories as the central phenomena and then began axial coding. Engaging in axial coding dictated that I explore the interrelationship of the categories, determining “causal conditions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Simply put, these are the conditions identified in the database that cause or influence the central phenomena to occur (Creswell, 1998). As seen in Figure 4, two of the identified categories, Presence and Communication, were

determined initially to be somewhat independent of each other, though in one respect, “literal Presence” as one of two classified meanings within this category, had to be present for Communication to occur. With the remaining two categories, and as defined by the deconstructions of lived experiences by novice teachers themselves, Trust and Integrity were certainly predicated one upon the other as is evident in Figure 4. This visual concept demonstrates that Presence less significantly influenced Communication between novice teachers and principals but that Integrity was tied inextricably to matters related to Trust. These findings culminated in a flow chart of information (Figure 5), which ultimately yielded the theoretical model upon which the final theory in this study emanated and upon which it is based (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Figure 5 also shows the interrelatedness of the four identified categories, termed as the central phenomena in this study. By design, I chose to express these determinations analogously to a chemical equation, showing that category 1, Presence, with its own properties and a plethora of supporting evidences, yields category 2, Communication. For some time, I debated the order Presence and Communication. The compelling question was this: which one must have occurred first for the other one to happen. Specifically, I debated the following rhetorical question: Did Communication promote Presence, or did Presence cause Communication to occur. In many ways the logic for working out the ultimate determination was much like asking the age-old question of which came first – the chicken or the egg. The participants’ stories were especially helpful to resolve this issue, and while Presence in its abstract form was determined to be necessary for Communication to occur within principals’ and teachers’

relationships, the two categories are linked, with one influencing the other, especially over time.

Likewise, these two conditions, as experienced either positively or negatively over time by novice teachers, yielded varying levels of Trust, Category 3, in the minds of the participants regarding their principals or administrators. The equation then shows that Integrity, Category 4, emanates directly from the experiences that novice teachers have had and which they have formulated within their own minds regarding trust. Whether positive or negative outcomes have been experienced, the four categories identified are very much interrelated and have direct proportional relationships one to another as demonstrated in Figure 5. These propositions are discussed in much greater depth and are addressed interpretively as findings in Chapter 5. The participants' actual experiences provided the evidences for advancing such claims and propositions.

The four phenomena of Presence, Communication, Trust, and Integrity are referenced and explained here to provide the basis of the theoretical model shown in Figure 5 with regard to how novice teachers in this specific study defined and interpreted their experiences regarding support or lack of it by their principals. Thus, generating a theory regarding support by principals of novice teachers dictates that such theory be “grounded” in the views and interpretations of participants.

As Creswell (1998) proposes, when a researcher follows these specific steps and procedures in a grounded theory study, he produces “an inductive model of theory development...” (p. 241). The participants' stories and lived experiences generated many examples of support and non-support as classified and revealed by them. These

happenings occurred over time, a significantly important element in the development of the ultimate theory. For some participants, the time was shorter than others. However, the subjects' final determinations about whether or not they were supported and either remained in the profession or transferred to a setting that was supportive grew directly out of the decision-making processes associated with the central phenomena shown in Figure 5. This figure demonstrates the interactions and processes that were used by all nine participants regarding their views of principal support. It is important to acknowledge here that none of the participants knew one another. They had neither taught in the same schools or even in the same districts with the exception of one person who left his teaching assignment after only one year and who taught in the same district as one other participant.

Having carefully followed the procedures outlined heretofore, I then generated and wrote a substantive theory to answer the overarching research questions that guided this study and which emanated from the participants themselves. The interrelatedness of the phenomena and the elements of time and experience were fully explored, providing a solid basis for the theory that is derived from this study. Significant discussion about and explication of the theory is offered interpretatively in Chapters 5 and 6; likewise, some of the recommendations made in Chapter 6 also draw largely upon the findings and theory posited forward in this study.

### **Positionality, Ethics, and Researcher Subjectivity**

As the researcher, I continually attempted to be aware of my positionality and subjectivity while conducting this study. It was important for me to frame who it is that I

am as a person, as a professional, and consequently, as a researcher. My ontological and epistemological beliefs certainly played a key part in how I both approached and conducted this study as well as how I viewed my research topic and participants. It was important for me to be reminded that philosophical assumptions are inherent in all qualitative work, including my own.

My purpose for engaging in this particular study was to create a type of critical theory that would be aimed ultimately toward action. Specifically, I wished to unearth and deconstruct the many stories that I believed that young teachers possessed about the support or lack of support that they received during their first few years of teaching. From the outset, I was interested in using the findings from my study to inform the educational leadership profession at large about what changes it might make, both holistically and even individually at specific school sites, to more genuinely and carefully mentor and support beginning teachers, given their perceived plethora of needs. It was and continues to be my intention to allow the voices of those whom I had already labeled in my mind as “the victims” - those who received little to no support and who either left or changed employment settings - to advance this cause. In this way, I was attempting to “lift the voices of marginalized or oppressed people” and foster some “change in our [professional education] society” (Creswell, 1998, p. 78). For me, this idea emerged from the postmodernist/new ethnography group who, as stated by Boland (1995), believes that “knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations” (p. 521).

Additionally, the notion of power and how it relates to both positionality and oppression entered into this equation; dealing with power automatically became part of this work.

I really viewed my research in this arena as a vehicle for or the conduit by which some enlightenment had the potential to take place within the educational leadership community. In some ways, based upon my findings, I wanted to examine in my own mind whether or not I was a supportive principal to new teachers when I was engaged as a building-level administrator in the public schools. Prior to beginning the study, I believed that I was a very supportive principal, and I thought that I could espouse credible evidence to suggest that this was the case. Of course, I was fully cognizant that I made these claims through my own beliefs and understandings about who it is that I think I was and am as a professional. Since some of my work in the higher educational arena at one time was to design co-sponsored efforts of support for both new and career teachers, I was very interested in the topic and felt that many novice teachers had a great deal to say about this particular critical issue in education. From the beginning, it was the stories and voices of beginning teachers that I wanted to be heard. For this reason, the research questions were linguistically crafted to incorporate narrative research terminology.

It is important, therefore, to acknowledge here that I clearly situate myself as a postmodern affiliate and specifically claim myself to be part of the constructivist paradigm. I am one who embraces the distinctiveness of the new paradigm, and I claim membership in what Goodall (2000) terms as an era of “the new ethnography” (p. 9). Subscribers within this theoretical framework believe that multiple realities exist; these realities always include those of the researcher, the individuals being researched, and the



reader or audience members (Creswell, 1998). It is equally vital to acknowledge such beliefs, and it is incumbent upon qualitative researchers both to concede and to report these multiple realities or ways of knowing, even when divergent understandings emerge between the researcher and research participants. Through the analysis and interpretative sections of this work, the voices of the subjects are clearly heard, and glimpses into the belief system of such members have been examined in Chapter 5 where carefully chosen quotes or passages are interwoven with thick, rich description and suitable analyses of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Wolcott, 1994b; Glesne, 2006). My writing, therefore, has been situated within a constructivist researcher's belief that reality is "shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values crystallized over time" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 168).

These characteristics of the research itself - the field work and resulting analysis - also imply something about the criticality of the writing process, a matter situated clearly in the middle of one's linguistic abilities and personal and professional ethics. Goodall (2000) sets an ethical stage for conducting exceptional qualitative writing by invoking what he calls "the hoary courtroom oath: 'tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'" (p. 155). Of course, getting at "the truth" or "Truth" is sometimes a complicated matter, I admit. Arriving at Truth is much about our multiple ways of knowing – how we derive the particular conclusions and beliefs that we all hold. Much of the time, our individual ways of knowing differ quite significantly, and our theoretical bases form the very foundations upon which our claims are made. Postmodernists believe, of course, that there are multiple ways of knowing, and arriving at "Truth" can

take many shapes and forms. As Glesne (2006) notes with regard to constructivists, "...human beings construct their perceptions of the world so that no one perception is 'right' or more 'real' than another. These realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables that are analyzed separately" (p. 7).

Similarly, our ways of interacting with our subjects rest upon our epistemological assumptions and the ethics that we embody with regard to getting the data that we need and want. I believed that I had a responsibility to spend significant time in the field, working closely with participants in ways that promoted true and "honest" collaboration. This statement, alone, implies that I believe that a researcher and his subjects should become one in the process. As referenced by Madison (1998) with regard to working with her own participants, "the self is reciprocally joined to other Selves... - I am because We are and We are because I am." (p. 474). Moreover, Guba and Lincoln (1988) aver that "the researcher tries to minimize the 'distance' or 'objective separateness' between himself and those being researched" (p. 94). I believe that I was able to connect well with my subjects throughout this study; moreover, I was consciously aware of the importance of bracketing my own feelings and opinions and allowing the stories of the novice educators to speak for themselves. My thoughts, opinions, beliefs and reactions to participants' claims were detailed in reflective memos throughout both the data gathering and analysis processes.

As a Caucasian, middle-aged, male professional educator, and, as a former public school teacher, principal, college professor/administrator, and currently an Assistant Superintendent of Schools, I knew that I must be fully mindful before I ever entered any

interview or research site because of how I might be viewed by young teachers. I was intentional about being very friendly and continually attempted to affirm these subjects as people who were both important and appreciated. Certainly, the same was true of those former teachers with whom I had contact, those who intentionally chose to leave the profession of teaching, either entirely or in part, due to a perceived lack of administrative support. In these ways, I was committed to “lessen the distance between myself and [the person] being researched” (Creswell, 1998, 75).

I was also mindful not to discuss my prior work in the professoriate and did not refer to my duties related to the senior administrative position that I held. Doing so might have distanced me unnecessarily from my teacher participants or could have made them feel gratuitously self-conscious about differences in positionality. The last thing that I wanted to do was to set up a dichotomy where participants could have viewed themselves as subordinate to me or less informed about teaching and learning. Again, the notion of power entered the equation here. Consequently, I decided not to discuss these matters unless specifically questioned about them. It was my hope that such issues would not be brought into any interview setting or discussion, and with the exception of two interviews, this was the case during the research process. I was clearly interested in hearing from the teachers themselves, not recounting or reliving my own stories and experiences. However, it is important to note here that my background in public school teaching and administration did aid me in engaging rather naturally with participants, especially in conversations and discussions regarding educational topics and concerns. To some degree, it seemed, we were often on common ground; thus, some bridges

seemed to have been built with most participants, even prior to my initial arrival in the field. These bridges were strengthened over the course of several months as data was collected.

Consequently, I presented myself to participants as a doctoral student researcher, relying heavily upon the fact that I conceived of myself as a learner in these situations, too. In this way, my positionality was constructed as “researcher as learner, not as expert or authority” (Glesne, 2006, p. 46). I found that this helped me to form connections with teacher participants early on and to build bridges of trust and ease with them. In many ways, I feel fairly confident that the notion of “co-researcher” was experienced during my study. I tried to remain ever cognizant of Behar’s (1993) cautionary statement: “We cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us” (p. 320). Despite my extensive work in education, I was clearly an outsider, one who sought to establish rapport, trust, and some sense of validity with my subjects in this particular study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Having conducted mini pilot studies in the past, I intentionally acknowledged in written format the many random thoughts and feelings as well as my own personal reactions to various situations that I encountered during the study. These acknowledgements were recorded within my field and observation notes as well as in verbal reflections captured via data recorder. In these ways, I worked out in my own mind those things that bothered or, at times, even irritated me, and I conceded those things about which I was clearly making judgments. Taking these steps allowed me to demonstrate ethical behavior as a qualitative researcher. Glesne (2006) describes this

process as “It is when you [the researcher] feel angry, irritable, gleeful, excited, or sad that you can be sure that your subjectivity is at work” (p. 120). These mini investigations of self, which culminated in reflective memos, allowed me to stay in touch with what I was learning and specifically with regard to who I was and how such emotions possibly keep researchers from ascertaining all that is being offered.

Given this particular dissertation study topic and my own background and work in various educational arenas for the past twenty-six years, I tried to remain especially mindful of my pre-conceived notions regarding educational issues, and I attempted to “continually confront [my own] opinions and prejudices with the data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 37). These were recorded in both reflective field notes and in oral reflective transcriptions. While I also concentrated on reducing my own biases throughout the research process, I understood that I could not “eliminate them” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 38), so I did make explicit my feelings, opinions, biases, and thoughts in writing as they occurred and as they became an inevitable part of my research. Failing to have acknowledged these would have promoted a lack of trustworthiness on my part and could have seriously called into question my ethics as a researcher.

Because I have been a school principal, I was aware initially that I could inadvertently approach my subjects with an aura of authority, which I knew they might perceive immediately and of which I might be totally unaware. In the planning stages of my research, I was cognizant that teachers might even assess me to be judgmental of them since I had served in the role of principal much more recently than school teacher. Additionally, I thought that some teachers might even see or perceive me right away as

either supportive or non-supportive, with or without reasoning, given their own recent experiences with both supportive and non-supportive administrators. My own position power, especially as I was holding the title of an Assistant Superintendent of Schools at the time this research was in process, could have produced negative effects in the multiple, lengthy interviews that I facilitated, so I was careful to downplay my professional role even when asked about the nature of my day-to-day work during some interviews.

Similarly, my pre-determined questions were carefully constructed and critiqued so that I did not inadvertently appear to be condescending in any way as I sought both to discover and understand the lived experiences of my research subjects. As I suspected early on, most of my participants were young females; my presence as a male and certainly as a male administrator could have evoked notions of superiority among these participants, but I feel that I connected with them well, despite the dynamics sometimes associated with gender and position. I think that I remained consciously aware of these important facts and worked intentionally to minimize such effects during the research process.

### **Credibility and Verification Procedures**

Creswell and Miller (1997) delineate as many as eight credibility and verification procedures that can be employed in qualitative research studies. These include the following: Prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review/debriefing; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checks; rich, thick description; and external audits (Creswell, 1998, pp. 201-203). These two

researchers recommend that “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them [procedures] in any given study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). I have delineated below those practices in which I engaged throughout this study. Bracketing researcher bias has been expounded upon in a previous part of this chapter and is intentionally not repeated below.

Perhaps part of the credibility that I built with participants evolved because I employed what Creswell (1998) describes as performing “member checks” (pp. 202-203). I solicited my participants’ views and feedback by providing them with selected documents for review throughout the research process, verifying with them that I was initially recording accurate accounts of their stories and experiences and that I was drawing conclusions, as well as expressing those in descriptive memos and other written documents, including Figures 1 through 5, with accuracy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider this act to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). I engaged in this process as a planned part of successive interview sessions and in occasional telephone conversations with all participants. In this way, they were able to provide me with “critical observations” and even “interpretations” of my own work (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

I also engaged in what Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) term as an external audit. I employed the services of a person with a qualitative research background who had no connections to this study but one who examined both the processes employed and related documents generated. This person’s assistance was especially helpful with methodological decisions and in examining both initial and final interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data as well as in making suggestions

about the presentation of findings and recommendations. This valuable service served to provide an audit analogous to a fiscal audit, described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), wherein a sense of inter-rater reliability was achieved.

It is true that I spent much time in the field, interviewing, dialoguing, and conversing with participants a number of times, both formally and informally. Fetterman (1989) contends that “working with people day in and day out, for long periods of time, is what gives qualitative research its validity and vitality” (p. 46). This allowed me to establish healthy working relationships with participants, build trust, and check for any misinformation that I might have deduced.

With regard to providing verification and credibility, I specifically chose these methods for this grounded theory study. Additionally, I employed the techniques identified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to achieve both verification and validity. As Creswell (1998) interprets below, verifying validity in the coding procedures of a grounded theory is significantly important. He notes the following:

One important step in grounded theory research is to develop open coding categories and then through axial coding, to interrelate these categories. Here an important verification step takes place. The researcher poses questions that related the categories and then returns to the data and looks for evidence, incidents, and events that support or refute the questions, thereby verifying the data (p. 209).

The processes described immediately above were used to verify these very matters as they specifically related to this dissertation study. Such verification procedures were employed throughout the coding steps, which are demonstrated in the procedural steps shown in Figure 1. These have been explained in the foregoing section of this chapter.



With regard to “supplemental validation,” (Creswell, 1998, p. 209), I included references to the associated literature regarding principals and support in Chapters 5 and 6 where the theory emanating from this study is also explained. Additionally, I also inserted, where appropriate, additional literature that was consulted as the interpretations and conclusions were being drawn and seemed to have significant impact upon the findings. These references help to support the theory generated and continue to confirm the existing gap between literature and practice that this very work sought both to identify and to provide recommendations for closing. Thus, such references offer validation for the accuracy of the findings and how both the findings and conclusions in this study differ from presently published literature.

## CHAPTER IV

### NOVICE TEACHER PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

#### **Nine Novice Teachers**

The following descriptions are intended to provide mini portraits of the nine novice teachers who participated in this study. Some personal information is reported, but much of what is communicated here details participants' experiences in their initial school assignments and well as their current employment status. Participants are identified by pseudonyms, which were chosen by the participants themselves. They are further identified as having worked in their respective initial schools and districts, which are also known by pseudonyms. Appendix F provides a cursory list of all participants and relevant information related to their novice teacher status.

#### **Alexis Campbell**

Alexis Campbell began her teaching career in the Miller School District. She graduated from a private university in North Carolina and majored in health and physical education. She described her pre-teaching field experiences as exciting, and while she holds a license to teach physical education in any K-12 setting in North Carolina, she came to really connect with middle school students while in college; thus, she sought a physical educator's position in a middle grades school. Following interviews for teaching positions in several different schools, Ms. Campbell was hired to teach grades 6

– 8 at Chadbourne Middle School. She taught in this school for one year before transferring to another school district due to a perceived lack of administrative support from her principal and assistant principals. She remains in the profession and talked a great deal about how supportive her current middle school and district are as compared to the first school in which she taught.

### **Juana Gonzales**

Ms. Juana Gonzales is a gifted musician. For all of her life, she has been interested in singing, so her college years were spent receiving formal training from a highly acclaimed voice teacher. She graduated with a music education degree, but she also concentrated in voice and conducting. Having served as a member of her high school band, where she advanced to the role of drum major, she also learned how to play a variety of instruments and particularly still enjoys playing drums. Her teaching license was issued as K-12 certification, but she saw herself more successful and interested in the secondary setting. She taught for three years at Catherine Elizabeth High School in the Hinshaw Public Schools, where she experienced what she described as strong initial support from her first principal. When administration changed, however, she soon concluded that she was in a toxic environment with a principal who could not be trusted and who maintained no integrity or respect from the faculty. All of the positive things that had been built over time, both within the school and through her choral music program, were attacked and advertently changed by edict from the second principal. She reported the same type of treatment projected by the second principal onto other faculty, many of whom had been established in this school for some time. Thus, she sought

another teaching venue. She feels fortunate and pleasantly surprised to have found a new middle school that was opening and needed a choral teacher. She continues to be excited about her work, reports that she is well-respected by her students and colleagues, and most recently she was awarded her school's highest honor – teacher of the year. She reported that she plans to remain in teaching as she feels this is her professional calling.

### **Anna Cantrell**

Anna Cantrell taught for three years in the Moser Graded School District. Serving as a second grade teacher, Anna formerly earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees in elementary education. Like other novice teachers, she had several interviews across various school districts. She settled on a teaching position at the Christopher Scott Elementary School, which served pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students. Following a three-year stint in this setting, Anna concluded that she was in a negative atmosphere where the principal was disconnected from faculty and where a sense of contempt and blame were constantly shifted to and among teachers, parents, and even students. She loved her school district, and decided to apply for a transfer to another school. She was granted a transfer following several interviews and is now serving as a reading specialist through the Title I program and seems to love her job. She has been in this new setting for one full year, is currently attending graduate school again, and plans to seek National Board Certification within the next few years.

### **Barbie Longest**

Barbie Longest attended a large state university as a non-traditional student where she earned a degree in elementary education. She formerly worked while attending

classes as a teacher's assistant in the Davis County Schools, where she was later employed as a teacher. She spent time at home with her children, and while working as a teacher's assistant, she began to see herself as capable and able to perform the tasks and roles of a teacher. Once she was hired at Parker-Scott Elementary School, she began to see significant differences in the teaching setting versus the one that she had experienced while a teacher's assistant. She taught fifth grade for three years and then decided to exit the profession. Currently, she works for a public agency, and the particular job that she now holds allows her to continue her skills as a teacher by making presentations in public schools and working with selected students on a one-to-one basis. She cited that she could no longer work in an unsupportive environment and had envisioned teaching to be much more satisfying than her actual teaching experience had proven to be. Thus, she exited the profession but still talks about the possibility of going back into teaching some day. She continues to keep her teaching license renewed so that she remains eligible for employment as a teacher.

### **Joseph Willingham**

Mr. Willingham was the only male participant included in this dissertation study. He taught secondary science courses at The Jesse Willard Academy, which is located in the McCauley City Schools. Joseph reported that he had always wanted to teach and that he could never remember wanting to do anything else as a career. However, following what he continually described as a "hopeless situation," he exited the profession after having taught only one year. He is currently employed by private industry where he still uses his scientific preparation. When asked if he might consider returning to education,

he remarked, “I’m just too hurt and gun shy right now to even think about it.”

Willingham described his first and only principal as uninterested in people, including students. Often, Willingham noted, “this principal engaged in vindictive acts.”

### **Christine Bellamy**

Having served as a seventh grade teacher in the James Venner School, the only K-8 school included in this dissertation study, Christine Bellamy transferred after having taught two years to a different school within her district to find support. She reported that she loved the area where she was living and that the school system had a solid reputation across many communities as a leader in public education. The Meares City Schools has received state-wide recognition with regard to educational practices and boasts some of the highest student achievement data in its region. Christine has remained in teaching and now cites that her experiences are “night and day” when compared to the first school in which she worked. She is pursuing a graduate degree in middle grades education from a nearby state university.

### **April Jones**

Mrs. April Jones has always found a special place in her heart for students who struggle to achieve. Thus, she majored in special education in college. Immediately following graduation, she was able to interview for several teaching jobs, in several school districts. Because she liked the locale and the social and cultural opportunities associated within the communities that comprised the Howard School District, she enthusiastically accepted an exceptional children’s teacher position at RBK Middle School. She taught in self-contained and resource settings for students in grades 6

through 8 and soon found herself as the lead exceptional children's teacher in her school. After serving in her school for three years, she elected to transfer to a neighboring school district because of what she characterized as "poor principal support." This participant also described her assistant principals as unsupportive, and at times, she felt that the male assistant principal "crossed the line" with regard to professional courtesy and etiquette. Mrs. Jones is married and has two small children, and she reports that she now has a "wonderful principal who is supportive of all teachers" in many tangible ways. She plans to remain in her school for a long time and cannot fathom leaving what she classified as a "comfortable but highly professional" setting.

### **Mattie Boggs**

Ms. Boggs taught first grade for two years at Carrie Lee Primary School, a K-2 setting located within the Loy County Schools. She attended a private university where she majored in both elementary education and Spanish. Following a reported difficult two years in her school, she decided to leave the profession. Currently, she is employed by a state agency where she serves as a liaison to the Spanish-speaking community. When questioned about her decision to leave, Mattie conceded that it was one of the hardest decisions that she had ever made and that her family was even disappointed that she would not continue to use the skills and preparation of the degree for which she had worked so hard. Like another participant who left the profession, Mattie reported that for now she could not entertain the notion of going back to teaching. This was due, she said, to "feeling so hurt and even betrayed by a cold, uncaring principal." Mattie also reported

that she is enjoying her work, but because she departed the profession for which she was trained, she sometimes “feels a bit guilty.”

### **Carolyn Seamster**

Having also trained as an elementary educator, Carolyn Seamster was employed as a kindergarten teacher at N. L. Williams Elementary School, a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school in the Williams School District. Like many other teachers, Carolyn reported that she could never remember wanting to do anything but teach, and she felt that she possessed special talents and a love for children, even as she approached her first teaching assignment. Carolyn, too, experienced a high degree of frustration in her first school, so after only one year of teaching, she transferred to a different school district where she currently teaches fourth grade. She remarked at how differently the principals in her two schools treated new teachers and noted “how opposite” they were in their philosophies of providing support. Carolyn also talked about how “uninviting” her first school was, which she discovered even within a few days of having accepted the job. “I knew,” she said, “that I had made a big mistake in going there.” She remains happily employed in a school now, which she reports as “an effective school where teachers are very valued and supported fully

### **Portraits of the Eight School Communities**

As part of the research design, the eight school districts selected for this study intentionally represent a variety of types including size, demographics, educational programming, and geographical locations. All nine participants in this study either teach in or formerly taught in these school districts. Since North Carolina is divided into



educational regions, it is important to note here that the selected school districts represent state regions IV through VII as currently defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Pseudonyms have been used intentionally to mask the identity of the actual names of the districts; however, data gathered and presented about each district chosen is represented accurately according to various data sources available at the time that this study was conducted. The districts' websites and selected personnel have been used as sources of information in addition to various state reports to document the statistical and descriptive profiles that follow. However, website references have been intentionally disguised when referenced in this chapter and have been omitted entirely from the references section to protect the identity of each district. To the extent possible, research was conducted to gain an overview of each school district's make-up, including student, faculty, and staff demographics; curriculum and instructional practices; instructional philosophy and programming; student achievement data; governance structures; and any district-wide and school-based efforts in place to support new teachers. These topics, in addition to any unique factors discovered about each district, form the following school system profiles:

### **Hinshaw Public School District**

The Hinshaw Public School District is among the ten largest in the state of North Carolina and ranks in the top 100 largest districts in the United States. Serving more than 50,000 students annually, this district is comprised of more than 80 schools, with alternative education centers and magnet schools included as choices for students and families. The budget for Hinshaw Public Schools is almost \$600 million per year, with

nearly one-quarter percent of the total budget derived from local resources. The per pupil expenditure, including all state, local, and federal funds, is more than \$8,000, which ranks among the highest per pupil allocations across the state. The district is governed by a nine-member board of education and boasts a large central office staff with many of them serving as curriculum support personnel. Staff includes assistant superintendents, executive directors, directors, specialists, curriculum facilitators, literacy coaches, program managers, and administrative assistants. Each curriculum area is organized as a team and is constituted to support delivery of instructional services. Elementary schools offer foreign language, visual arts, performing arts, specialized music classes, and physical education. Middle schools provide a gradual transition to departmentalized teaching where students take core classes in addition to a variety of electives including world languages, life skills, and technology. The secondary schools in this district offer a comprehensive curriculum at regular, honors, and Advanced Placement levels. A specialized career academy also offers more than 30 vocational programs of study, open to students district-wide, and approximately 30 Advanced Placement courses are offered across the district.

Regarding student achievement, in the most recent academic year, the district met more than 90 percent of its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets as required through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The percentage of targets being met has continually increased since the inception of this federal legislation enacted in 2001. Additionally, more than half of the individual schools in this district attained AYP.

Demographically, the Hinshaw Public School District's students are 45% white, 31% black, 18% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 4% multiracial, and less than 1% American Indian. Fifty-nine percent of graduating students attend four-year post-secondary institutions while an additional 26% of graduates attend two-year technical schools or community colleges. Of this number, the district reports that approximately 75% matriculate with degrees in their respective programs of study.

Regarding faculty members, this district employs approximately 3,000 teachers in addition to more than 700 other licensed professionals. The racial/ethnic make-up of faculty and administrators is approximately three-fourths white and one-fourth other (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009). All teachers in the Hinshaw district receive laptop computers and are eligible for cash advancements for relocation expenses; additionally, a tuition reimbursement plan is in place for all employees who wish to engage in graduate education or who take course work to pursue additional licensure. Financial retention incentives have been implemented over time by this school system, with personnel who teach in high economically disadvantaged schools paid a differential salary. A local salary supplement ranges from nearly 10 percent to 14 percent for instructional personnel, based on years of experience completed in the district (Hinshaw Public School District website).

The district does subscribe to an organized support system for beginning and new teachers; a specialized program has been creatively crafted by district personnel who are housed in the human relations area. Novice teachers are required to participate in a year-long series of workshops and seminars that center upon curriculum efforts, employee

requirements, evaluation of personnel, student discipline, the mentoring process, collaborative planning, and other topics of both interest and need for beginning teachers. Those employees new to the district, but not new to teaching, are also mentored by the district through their first year of experience. No specific extension of these efforts, however, is replicated in schools. Where such additional support efforts occur, they have been created by principals, administrative teams, and assigned mentors in selected schools. At the core of these support efforts is the expectation that a high standard of professional excellence is expected to be developed and thus displayed by school personnel (Hinshaw Public School District website).

### **Moser Graded School District**

The Moser Graded School District resides in a county where there is both a county and a city school district. The Moser Graded School District is the county system and is comprised of 12 schools, including a year-round option for which students must apply and be accepted as well as a grades 6 – 12 alternative school. Moser is located in a relatively affluent area, with citizens having access to several public and private university campuses, diverse cultural opportunities, and an international airport. The area is rich historically and has been home to successful writers, artists, and musicians. Additionally, many sporting events are held in the immediate and surrounding areas; these ways of life attract a diverse population, many of whom have children in this county school system. The number of students enrolled exceeds 7,000 each year.

Teachers and licensed support personnel account for more than 650 employees while nearly 200 teaching assistants are employed across the district. This school system

prepares students to become responsible citizens in a diverse world by promoting high academic standards and offerings with an emphasis on personalizing educational experiences to maximize individual student successes. One-fifth of all faculty members are National Board Certified Teachers, and nearly two-fifths of faculty hold master's degrees and/or terminal degrees in their respective areas of licensure (Moser Graded School District website).

The Moser Graded School District is governed by an elected five-member board of education and meets twice monthly to conduct business related to the district. A central office staff hosts more than 20 personnel, with the majority of them concentrated in the curriculum and instructional division. The teaching staff is 86 percent white and 14 percent other. The per pupil expenditure is high compared to most districts, especially when compared to smaller districts like Moser. A total of more than \$ 9,800 is spent per student each year from state, local, and federal financial resources, rendering it one of the top five funded districts in the state. Additionally, this school system ranks in the top quartile with regard to its commitment of local funds spent on education. Finally, it is important to note that this affluent area is near the very top when comparing per capita personal income across the 100 counties in the state (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009).

A high percentage of graduates from Moser's high schools attend four-year in-state and out-of-state colleges and universities each year. Nearly 63% attend four-year institutions while another 25% attend technical schools, community colleges, or highly specialized professional programs. Thus, student achievement in this district is high,

though white students out-perform non-whites. Economically disadvantaged students' proficiency on end-of-course and end-of-grade testing pales in comparison to those who are classified as non-economically disadvantaged (NC School Report Card, 2009). While the district did not meet its requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), it did meet 92% of its target goals as established by the No Child Left Behind legislation. With regard to the four-year cohort graduation rate, the Moser district scored more than 10% higher than the state's average (NC School Report Card, 2009). Students in grades 3 – 8 outperformed their counter parts across the state in both reading and mathematics, and secondary students score well, especially in the areas of English, mathematics, social studies, and history (Moser Graded School District website).

It is important to note that there is no established formal program dedicated to the ongoing support of novice teachers in this district. The human resources department is small in number, and personnel in this division do offer initial orientation sessions and meet with new teachers twice during the academic year to discuss emerging concerns, policies and procedures related to working in the district, and employee evaluation processes. According to a senior leader in the district, the support of novice teachers is left to the individual principals in the school, and based upon an examination of the schools' individual websites, support efforts vary greatly from one site to another. The North Carolina School Report Card (2009) cites turnover rates by school levels; in this district, almost 19% of elementary teachers left during the prior school year, compared to a state average of 12% during the same year. A total of more than 20% of middle and secondary teachers also left; the state average for these two levels combined is

approximately 28%. These statistics represent what appears to be a high turnover rate, despite the system's ability to compensate its employees well.

### **The Miller School District**

Miller School District is located in a very rural setting and is comprised of 14 schools, including one alternative K-12 school and an early college high school. The district is governed by a seven-member elected board of education, and the schools are served by a small central office staff. The Miller attendance area, comprised of several small communities, has lost numerous jobs since the economic turndown earlier in this decade. Historically, farming, and raising and harvesting tobacco in particular, has comprised the majority of work for county residents as well as a number of migrant workers, who have increased in population over the last 12 years. Additionally, several textile plants were very successful in the area during the last century and employed a large segment of the population, but such businesses have all but closed their doors given recent global marketplace trends. Farming remains viable, and many public school students see their futures connected to this time-honored way of life. Currently, farmers in this particular region enjoy huge tax breaks by comparison to other agricultural locales in the state; as a result, the tax base for the county and for its school system is weakened, particularly when coupled with waning business and industry. The tax burden, therefore, is shouldered mainly by residents who live in several small municipalities. These residents pay more than .75 per \$100 valuation on houses, lots, and small acreage. Residents who hold professional jobs typically travel to neighboring counties where a variety of careers and work settings are available.

While the school plants are well-maintained physically, programmatic offerings are limited, with very few Advanced Placement courses made available to secondary students (Miller School District Course Selection Guide 2009-2010). Foreign languages are taught only in the high school settings, and due to significant local and state budgetary constraints experienced within the last two academic years, resulting in few foreign language teachers, only upperclassmen are able to participate. Music, art, and physical education classes are offered at all elementary schools, but faculty in these areas are shared between two schools. Nearly 85% of all faculty and staff members are long-time residents of the county and desire to teach only in their respective school communities. A significant portion of them have earned their teaching degrees through community college transfer programs. Having completed two years of general coursework at these institutions, many then transferred to four-year state institutions in the nearby areas to complete education degrees with teacher licensure.

Demographically, the total teaching staff numbers nearly 400, with 97% being white and the remaining 3% black. No other ethnic groups are represented among faculty or support personnel, including teacher assistants. The student population is comprised of 88% white, 3% black, 5% Hispanic, and 4% other. Based upon recent statistics recorded by the state, less than 30% of graduating seniors attend four-year colleges and universities, but nearly 40% of all graduates attend two-year technical schools or community colleges. Another 26% of graduating students go directly into the workforce (North Carolina Statistical Profile – 2009). While this district does experience students who drop out, it boasts one of the lowest dropout rates across the state. Additionally,



within the last academic year, Miller School District earned recognition from the state for having one of the lowest turnover rates of teachers across the region and state (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction – News 2009).

This low turnover rate is attributed in part to a very strong support effort for beginning and new teachers. The program was conceived by a central office administrator who created a district-specific effort to work with beginning teachers across their first three years. This administrator's personal commitment to these teachers is demonstrated through her constant attention to a strong mentoring program, which includes meetings and planning sessions with a lead mentor group who helps to shape and craft additional support efforts within their own school settings. The central administrator also holds sessions with principals and continually highlights the importance of implementing strategies at the school level aimed at supporting beginning teachers through their initial years of employment. This same central administrator participates in regular classroom observations of new teachers but also serves as a district curriculum director. In this way, she is able to work with new teachers on a variety of levels, and she attributes her success to building relationships with new teachers as people first and then as professional colleagues. Monthly meetings are held for beginning teachers, and topics specific to their needs are presented along with problem-solving discussions. This program is formally named and was recognized within the last two years during an auditing process as an outstanding retention effort in North Carolina (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction – News).

Overall the district struggles to provide an education beyond the basic requirements as set forth by the state. In the past two years, it has lost nearly 40 teaching positions, due in part to declining enrollment but largely through discretionary reductions of state funds. The district continues to serve approximately 6,000 students and maintains partnerships with two universities and one community college. Presently, students are able to take classes through the North Carolina Virtual Public High School and through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's I-School (Miller School District website).

### **McCauley City Schools**

McCauley City Schools is located in a county where there are two city school systems and a county system. Consequently, this selected school system is a small one, comprised of less than five schools. The municipality in which this district resides is located within a fifty-mile radius of several major cities in the state; citizens and students, therefore, have access to quite a few surrounding major state and private four-year institutions as well as one community college located within the district's own borders. This particular geographic locale is situated as a small community with a big city-like culture (McCauley website). The research subject from this area described it as having "magical appeal," featuring restaurants, historic sites, many art galleries, and specialty boutiques. A number of festivals are held in the area seasonally throughout the year, bringing a number of visitors and cultural traditions together in a small community.

Education is described as an important aspect in this town's quality of life (McCauley website). Citizens and residents appear to be committed to excellence in

education and dedicated to increasing the strength and diversity of the educational system. The secondary school located in the McCauley district boasts the highest graduation rates of any high school in North Carolina. The district's mission is to guarantee excellent educational opportunities to provide life-long learning and to promote responsible citizenship; the district values relationships and seeks to partner with students, their families, and the broader community to achieve these results (McCauley City Schools Annual Report 2009).

McCauley City Schools serves approximately 1,300 students and is ranked in the top 40 school systems across the state with regard to per pupil expenditures. Nearly \$9,400 is allocated to schools from state, local, and federal resources (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009). More than 80% of high school graduates in this district attend either four-year or two-year post secondary institutions.

Demographically, the system is majority white, but African-Americans, Asians, American Indians, multiracial, and other students form the student body across grades K through 12 (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009). The teaching faculty number approximately 100 and are represented ethnically as whites, Asians, Hispanics, African-Americans, and multi-racial people. In addition to building-level and central administrators, an additional 14 professional support staff are employed as are more than 30 teaching assistants and approximately 25 other classified support personnel across the district. It is noteworthy that more than 75% of all teachers employed in the district hold advanced degrees in their respective subject areas. Additionally, a supplemental tax for education is collected in this district and totals nearly one million

dollars annually; thus, this school system ranks in the top five districts across the state with respect to local funds being used to support education (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009).

Student achievement data reveals that McCauley City Schools excels and is highly competitive with its counterparts across the state. For example, grades 3 through 8 end-of-grade testing results indicate that these students exceed the state average in reading by more than 10% and by nearly 15% in mathematics, placing these students near the top in academic performance in North Carolina. Secondary students in this district also significantly outperform their state peers in English, Algebra I, Algebra II, History, Civics and Economics, and Biology, again resulting in top academic performance as measured and determined by end-of-year state testing (North Carolina School Report Card, 2009).

Regarding support for beginning teachers, no formal system of district-wide support has been initiated to date. Instead, according to the participant who was interviewed from this district, each school principal is in charge of such efforts, and this responsibility is delegated to principals based upon the North Carolina evaluation instrument developed specifically for school-based educational leaders. In particular, the recruitment and especially the retention sections of the assessment apply to principals and would require that at least a minimal amount of demonstrable evidence be available for review by superiors. Finally, it should be noted here that only a 3% turnover rate in teachers was noted in the elementary level during the 2007-2008 school year, which was significantly below the state average of 12% for that academic year. With regard to

middle and high school teacher turnover rates, the district mirrored the state average of 15% for the middle school level and posted less than a 10% turnover rate at the secondary level. The state average turnover rate for high schools in 2007-2008 was 14% (North Carolina School Report Card, 2009).

### **The Howard School District**

The Howard School District is a medium-sized district in North Carolina; it is comprised of approximately 36 schools, which includes an early college and a middle college high school as well as a grades 6-12 alternative school. This district is included among the 20 largest districts in the state and serves more than 20,000 students. Growth continues to occur in this area, with student enrollment climbing district-wide by as many as 600 students per year. The district is situated within a rather large geographic area that embodies both rural and suburban characteristics. This school system is the product of a merger between two former districts located in the same county; one was a city unit with an appointed board of education and the other a county system with an elected board. The merger took place more than 15 years ago, and the resulting system emerged initially with characteristics from both former systems that were considered to be of high quality. Over time, the system, as a new entity, has taken on new elements and exists now as a “district committed to high quality teaching and learning” (Howard School District website).

One of the system’s published priorities is to recruit, train, support, and retain high quality employees. An emphasis is also placed on educating all students to meet high academic standards and to become responsible citizens in a rapidly changing

environment (Howard School District website). There is much community support for education across the district, with many organized civic organizations and business partners committed to promoting and advancing academic achievement and providing career and educational opportunities for students in the system.

The demographics for Howard's students are as follows: white – 54%; African American – 23%; Hispanic – 17%; Asian – 1.5%; American Indian – less than %; and multiracial – nearly 4% (Howard School District website). Approximately 35% of graduating seniors attend public universities within the state while almost 10% enroll in four-year out-of-state institutions for post secondary education. Another 37% of graduating seniors attend two-year technical schools or community colleges within the state (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009).

Student achievement data indicate that just above 60% of students in grades 3 through 8 scored at or above grade level in reading while the state's average proficiency rating for reading in these grades was nearly 68%. In mathematics, the same group of students scored just slightly above the state average of 80%. Secondary students scored below state average in English, Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, biology, and civics and economics. Students taking chemistry and physics scored just slightly above the state average in the prior year.

More than 1600 teachers are employed in this district and are paid from state, local and federal funds. Additionally, 225 professional support personnel are employed annually, and classified staff members include some 800 individuals who serve in clerical, service-related, skilled and unskilled labor, and instructional assistant roles.

Some 125 central and building-level administrators are charged with providing leadership and support to the schools in this district. Eighty-five percent of the teaching faculty are white, 10% are African American, and the remaining 5% are classified as other (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009).

The support efforts for beginning teachers have evolved and changed over time. Within a few years following the merger of the two former systems, an entity within the human resources department was charged with providing support to all teachers, including those who would pursue National Board Certification, additional and add-on licensure, beginning teachers, lateral entry personnel, and career teachers. A partnership was formed with a university to provide co-sponsored programs for all of these groups of employees. Many teachers were served through these various programs, and faculty and administrators in both the university and public school settings were employed as instructors and coaches to provide meaningful and relevant support for the teacher groups listed above. As central administration changed, and as key players in the formal partnership retired or otherwise vacated their positions, the formal structure of a co-sponsored support effort, especially for beginning teachers, waned. The school district itself took full ownership and responsibility for creating programs to meet the needs of new teachers.

A uniquely named support program exists currently, and beginning teachers meet with selected personnel throughout their first two years of teaching to discuss topics of interest, areas of concern, ongoing training, specific district efforts, curriculum areas, and evaluation and assessment of new teachers (Howard School District website, Human

Resources Division). The teacher turnover rate for this district within the past year exceeds the state's average in all three school levels. In elementary schools, 13% left the district while the state average was 12%. In middle and high schools, 15% left at both levels; the state's average for these levels was 14% for both middle and high schools. Similarly, the district's turnover rate for principals in the past year was 13% while the state average was at 12%.

### **Davis County Schools**

The Davis County Schools is one of the very largest school districts in North Carolina and ranks in the top 15 largest districts in the United States. This district was born out of merger more than 30 years ago, combining at that time one large county system and a smaller city unit. More than 135,000 students are served annually in nearly 140 schools with almost 8,000 students graduating each year. Nearly 65% of these graduates pursue post secondary education at four-year colleges or universities with more than 27% pursuing studies at two-year technical schools, junior colleges, or community colleges (Davis County Schools website). Some 27% of students in the district are labeled as academically gifted, and many of these students are served in themed magnet schools. Likewise, approximately 14 percent of the student population is served through special education programs, some of which are housed in self-contained settings in special schools. The schools operate on several calendars including year-round, modified, and community-college driven schedules (Davis County Schools website).

The ethnicity of students is comprised of 52% white, 27% African-American, nearly 12% Hispanic, almost 6% Asian, and 4% multiracial. Less than one percent of



students are American Indian. Approximately 14% of all students are served as English Language Learners (ELL), and of the total student population, almost 30% qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch (Davis County Schools website).

The operating budget for the previous school year totaled more than \$1.2 billion; the district reports that 88 percent of these state, local, and federal dollars directly benefited the schools. While approximately 62% of funds to operate this large system are allocated from the state, it is important to note that more than 30% of funds are generated through local sources. This school system employs nearly 10,000 teachers, and with instructional support personnel included, more than 11,000 employees are responsible for delivering instruction to the many students who comprise Davis County Schools (Davis County Schools website).

According to the state's Statistical Profile (2009), slightly more than 80% of teachers and administrators are white while 10% are African American. The remaining 10% is classified as Asian, Hispanic, American Indian, and multiracial. Almost 460 central and building-level administrators provide oversight and leadership for this large district, and non-professional support employees total more than 5200 people (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile – 2009).

This district recognizes and makes public that more than 25% of its teaching force is eligible to retire within the next five years. A well established leadership academy, located within close proximity to this school district, serves as a formal partner and has collaborated with experts across the country as well as with state universities to form a support effort for a variety of new employees, of which beginning teachers are a part.

More than 50 seminars have been jointly developed and are co-sponsored throughout an academic year for novice teachers and employees new to the district. Through a successive planning model, the district has developed nine unique training opportunities, beyond the specialized effort for new teachers, which aim to train and retain employees. With regard to teacher turnover, as measured during the previous academic year, Davis County Schools ranks well below state average for elementary, middle and high school teacher turnover.

### **Meares City Schools**

This school district has been in existence for more than 100 years and is situated in an affluent county where both a county and city school system exist. Meares boasts one of the highest averages of SAT scores across the state. Almost 1300 of its secondary students are enrolled in one or more Advanced Placement courses each year; this statistic has earned both of the district's high schools a place in a nationally ranked report among schools in the United States. More than 92% of last year's seniors enrolled in and attended either a two-year or four-year institution. The four-year graduation cohort rate ranks among the top in the state at nearly 90%, and the system maintains one of the lowest dropout rates with just over one percent of students dropping out of school. Another distinctive feature of this district is that more than 200 faculty members hold National Board Certification, and 42% of all teachers hold master's degrees, six-year degrees, or doctoral degrees. The most recent statistics show that the Meares district has a turnover rate of less than 9%, which for the previous academic year, was half of the state's average percent (Meares City Schools website).

This school system employs nearly 2000 staff members, of which almost 1200 are teachers and administrators. The mission of the district is “to empower all students to acquire the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and insights necessary to live rewarding, productive lives and be prepared to contribute positively to the global community” (Meares City Schools website). A number of recruitment incentives are offered for teachers including \$ 1,500 signing bonuses, a 12% local supplement, salary advances for beginning teachers, housing assistance, discounted and extended banking services, and discounts at numerous local businesses. Similarly, a variety of formal, district-sponsored support efforts are in place for novice teachers. A week-long novice teacher orientation is provided with extra compensation; teachers newly employed by the district are also compensated while attending a three-day new teacher orientation. Beginning teachers also participate in a support group, which meets monthly in teachers’ classrooms by level across the district. This is a required activity for teachers in their first two years of teaching. Sessions are specifically geared to meet the emerging needs of novice educators; social events are also included as part of these monthly sessions. Trained and paid mentors are also carefully assigned to beginning teachers, and a peer assistance and review program provides several paid master teachers to work one-on-one with beginning teachers who are identified either by their principals or by themselves as needing additional support in the classroom.

The academic performance of students in grades 3 through 8 is significantly high, with reading scores on end-of-grade tests reaching more than 90% of these students attaining either at or above grade level status, compared to the state average of 67%.

Likewise, in mathematics, this same group out performs its peers across the state by more than 10 percentage points, with the state average just slightly above 80% in the preceding academic year. Secondary students perform in like manner, with all required and optional tested end-of-course subjects well above state averages (North Carolina School Report Card, 2009). Clearly, this district is one in the state that currently sets the benchmark for high student performance; consequently, its scores at all levels and in all subjects tested contribute to the state's average being raised in all subject areas. Still, an achievement gap exists in this district as demonstrated through state data. Hispanic, African American, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities score significantly lower than both their white and economically advantaged counterparts (North Carolina School Report Card, 2009). The district makes this fact known in its published reports and has included with its mission and vision statements some additional documents that demonstrate a renewed commitment to excellence and an equity clause. It is currently seeking the solutions to removing instructional barriers that prevent the aforementioned groups from reaching high levels of success (Meares City Schools website).

### **Loy County Schools**

The Loy County School district also ranks among the largest school systems across North Carolina. Presently, it serves nearly 74,000 students and remains the largest employer within a 15-county area. The district has more than 120 schools, and these are located within rural, urban, and inner-city areas across a very large county. Students have many choices in this district; they may apply to attend special schools that focus on

particular subjects and specified career pathways. They may also participate in specialized academies established within their respective home-based high schools, and, for those students for whom the traditional middle and high school settings do not meet their needs, there are several alternative schools available, some of which have flexible scheduling and a reduction in graduation requirements. Many magnet schools exist that offer both regular comprehensive curricula in addition to specialized studies, including communications, math/science, cultural arts, and foreign languages. There are both early and middle college high schools located across the district as well as several International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. Additionally, there are many established business partnerships across the region that support both the district as well as individual schools. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) are well established in many of the schools, with membership of parents and teachers among the highest percentage found across North Carolina (Loy County Schools website).

All new teachers, regardless of novice or career status, attend a district-sponsored support effort. In addition to face-to-face sessions held monthly, beginning teachers and those new to the district also participate in online professional development and blogs, designed specifically to develop them as quality, successful educators (Loy County Schools website). Several new teacher orientation sessions are held in different geographic locations across the district, and lateral entry personnel are served in a similar but separate effort specific to their particular needs and induction requirements. Areas of focus for these particular personnel include licensing, induction, advising, networking, informing, and coaching. Sessions for both novice and new teachers focus on district-

wide policies, classroom management techniques, parent conferencing skills, planning and evaluating effective lessons, and following the state's established Essential Standards. Sessions throughout the year regard effective questioning, multiple intelligences literature, learning styles, establishing expectations, time management, understanding the culture of one's school, and differentiating instruction (Loy County Schools website).

Regarding teacher turnover rates, the district's ratings for the prior school year are as follows: elementary school faculty – 11%; middle school faculty – 14%; and secondary school faculty – 14%. These compare nearly exactly to the state's averages across respective school levels for the prior school year (North Carolina School Report Card, 2009). With regard to faculty members who hold advanced degrees, Loy County Schools again ranks close to state averages, as follows: elementary level – 24%; middle level – 28%; and secondary – 24% as compared to averages of North Carolina teachers who hold advanced degrees - 27%, 25%, and 25% - respectively (North Carolina School Report Card, 2009).

Student achievement as measured by North Carolina's end-of-grade and end-of-course tests show that students in the district typically fall just below the state's average during the past academic year. Students' combined academic performance in grades 3-8 in reading is just above 65% proficiency and in mathematics is 80%. The state's average for reading indicates 68% proficiency and 80% proficiency in mathematics. Regarding grades 9-12 testing, the district's performance was approximately five percentage points below state average proficiencies in English I, Algebra I, Algebra II, chemistry, physics,

civics and economics, and United States history. Physical science scores were nearly 20% lower than the state's average proficiency scores. Overall, students judged to be at or above grade level were slightly lower at the start of the 2007-2008 school year and continued to underperform their state counterparts at the end of the 2008-2009 academic year (North Carolina School Report Card, 2009).

The district has significant resources and spends more than \$9,000 per pupil each year. Local resources committed to schools indicate that the district is among the top 15 in the state. The total of state, federal, and local resources also show that the district ranks in the top 60 school districts with regard to per pupil expenditures ( North Carolina Public Schools Statistics Report – 2009).

Finally, the demographic make-up of students in the district indicates that a diverse population is served. Thirty-nine percent of students are white, 41% are African American, 6% are Asian, nearly 10% are Hispanic, less than 1% is American Indian, and approximately 5% are multi-racial (Loy County Schools website). The district employs a significant number of employees, with part-time and full-time totaling more than 10,000. District administrators, managers, and school-based leaders total more than 300, and nearly 5,000 teachers are employed across the many schools that make up this district (Loy County Schools website). According to the school district, more than half of the students served qualify for and receive free or reduced lunch prices. The district also reports that it has less than a 4% dropout rate. Loy County Schools is also rated among the 50 largest school districts in the United States and among the top 10 in North Carolina (Loy County Schools website).

Approximately 57% of graduating seniors attend four-year in-state and out-of-state institutions each year with another 33% attending two-year technical schools or community colleges. Nearly 6% of all graduates go immediately into careers while less than 2% join some branch of the armed forces (North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Report – 2009). Of this 2%, nearly 30 students earn military academy appointments (Loy County Schools website).



## CHAPTER V

### INTERPRETATIONS AND FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides specific insight into the nine novice teachers' lived experiences in non-supportive settings. The organization of this chapter is intentionally devoted to presenting the data gathered from participants; it provides the most significant data collected, and relates selected vignettes from the research subjects' own stories and lived experiences as novice teachers.

With regard to stories and experiences of research participants, Gause (2001) notes, "The stories of people's lives are communicated through the use of narratives" (p. 69). Similarly, "Narrative is the discourse form which can express the diachronic perspective of human actions. It retains their temporal dimension by exhibiting them as occurring before, at the same time, or after other actions or events" (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 9). Narratives are the most appropriate form of describing human interactions, as well as making sense of those interactions. Bruner (1990) argues that narratives are the natural mode in which human beings make sense of lives in time. "Perhaps the most essential ingredient of narrative accounting (or storytelling) is its capability to structure events in such a way that they demonstrate...a sense of movement of direction through time" (Gergen & Gergen, 1986, as quoted in Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 9). "People do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence." Rather, "They

frame events and sentences in larger structures” (Bruner, 1990, p. 64, as cited in Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 12). Polkinghorne (1997) also stated, “A narrative report, however, displays the acceptability of a claim rather than argues for it...researchers speak with the voice of the storyteller...they speak in the first person as the teller of their own tale” (pp. 15-16). Gause (2001) further asserts, “The analyses of data in narrative research proceeds inductively to find commonalities among the participants and their stories...however, they did not begin to resonate until I actually began to experience the stories, which contained the ‘breath of life’” (p. 73).

To relate participants’ experiences as narrative, data from the participants themselves is often intentionally interspersed in this chapter with interpretive discussions and analytical interpretations of such data as well as findings grounded within additional research. The major themes that emerged from this dissertation study are offered first, and then the case for the theory itself is presented, culminating in the explicit theory that emerged from this work. Finally, in keeping with the methodological decisions made as presented in Chapter 3, the treatment of data and findings within this chapter should be viewed as an inductive process whereby the grounded theory is being developed. Similarly, the staging of data and the resulting interpretations of that data should be viewed as a continual testing of the theory as it emerges. Testing the theory across multiple educational contexts and within a variety of causal conditions was important; thus, the most salient data from all participants have been included herein.

### **School Culture: The Overarching Arena for Support**

It is important to situate the lived experiences of participants within an overall framework of understanding. A significant portion of the literature review (Chapter 2) was devoted to the impact that school culture has on the educational process, and it has been made clear by researchers who have specialized in teacher retention that creating and maintaining a positive school culture is a critical element. As is continually defined in the literature reviewed heretofore, the responsibility for either creating or maintaining a healthy culture clearly rests on principals' shoulders at the building level. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings discovered throughout this work was that novice teachers maintained their own understandings of both healthy and toxic cultural elements and characteristics. While they may not typically have received specific training through their respective undergraduate or even graduate educational programs in school culture, often beginning teachers can articulate with remarkable preciseness and great detail the characteristics associated with their respective schools' climate, environment, and ethos, all of which are significant elements of school culture.

Participant Joseph Willingham, who taught science for one year at The Jesse Willard Academy, described his school in this way: "It was a place that bred contempt...There was no spirit of teamwork, and teachers generally didn't help one another; worse, the principal promoted a sense of competition among individual teachers, so sharing ideas and materials was really non-existent." Willingham also reported during his second interview that "teachers really didn't care about the success of all students in the school; they closed their doors and taught only their students. We never worked

together, so experienced teachers never had any real sense that they should help us new teachers.”

Willingham, a first year teacher, was describing an element of the culture in his school. The lack of collaboration and communication among faculty members left him to feel isolated and unassisted. It was clear that he understood that “the leader [principal],” as he later stated, should have created structures and conditions such that collaboration and even a spirit of cooperation permeated the entire culture of the school. Willingham’s description in itself calls for leaders to understand and act upon the research related to professional learning communities as expertly defined and interpreted most recently by DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008), particularly as it relates to promoting and raising student achievement and increasing quality teaching.

The descriptions, stories shared, and incidents reported by the nine novice teachers in this study confirmed that they could describe, with great detail, many cultural elements present within their respective schools. While they did not use the academic language often found in published literature to describe school culture, they did give insight and understanding into the specificity of school culture as they had experienced it in their daily lives as young teachers. Since most of the conversations and interviews centered upon inquiries related to principal support, many participants described school culture from this particular perspective; however, most were able to process and then report how a perceived lack of support for teachers also affected the entire school environment, including undesirable characteristics associated with school culture that

students so often experience, as reported in the literature, as well as those factors that affect learning and student achievement within schools.

Participant Alexis Campbell remarked during the initial interview that the overall environment in her first school setting was attributable to the way that her principal behaved and interacted with all stakeholders. She noted the following:

My principal behaved in an angry way most of the time. Students and teachers were treated as if they were always on the verge of doing something wrong. There was never any positive feedback to any of us that I observed. Students and even some faculty acted out in response to this treatment... This all resulted in a very negative and hostile environment, which is no fun place to work or to try to learn.

Through these types of experiences, participants were able to communicate their beliefs about how an entire school's culture was affected either by principal support or the lack thereof. It is fitting, therefore, to frame the results and interpretations of this study, including the grounded theory generated, within school culture, which serves as an appropriate contextual backdrop and orientation. As a result of this decision, it became important nearer the end of this work to re-read professional literature and to examine studies related to school culture as well as to search for new information about school culture and its co-relatedness to administrative support. Doing so enlightened my overall understanding of the importance of school culture and equally underscored the significance that this factor continues to have upon teachers' work settings and their perceptions regarding supportive environments.

## **Does Mentoring Constitute Administrative Support?**

A recent study by Duke University researchers Wynn, Carboni, and Patall (2007) discussed the importance of principals creating conditions whereby teachers felt supported. Having followed and surveyed 217 first and second year teachers in one school district over time, specifically examining reasons for and conditions related to novice attrition among that group of educators, their findings reaffirmed that young, inexperienced teachers' decisions to remain at their school sites and even in the one school district studied were most strongly associated with school climate and principal leadership. The Duke study also showed that mentoring remains a critical element in supporting new teachers. One chief recommendation made by these researchers' was that an effective mentoring program, infused with principal leadership and highly trained master teachers, should be established in every school to provide novice teachers as mentees with daily support from their mentors.

It is interesting to note here that nearly all of the participants in this dissertation study discussed mentoring as a key element in their own support. Several subjects reported that without having had official mentors from whom they sought advice and from whom they learned to navigate "difficult landscapes" within their schools, they "would not have made it" (Barbie Longest, participant). However, as part of the interviewing process, questions related to mentoring, its importance, and then its relevance to overall principal support, yielded the following short but salient statements noted by participant Alexis:

Having a good mentor does not trump having support from your principal...I had a very effective mentor, and that was such a lifesaver many days. To me, mentoring is very important and necessary, but in the end, my decision to leave my school was because I did not have any direct support from my principal or assistant principals.

Mattie Boggs, a first-grade teacher in the Carrie Lee Primary School, shared during her first interview that she, too, had experienced strong mentor support throughout two years of teaching. “My mentor checked on me daily, she critiqued my lesson plans, made suggestions, and spotted things that would cause me problems. She really cared about me and offered herself and her services to me.” Yet, after teaching for two years in this particular school, Mattie chose to pursue a career in retail sales. When asked to cite the reasons, she said,

...My principal was never interested in knowing who I was. She was an aloof person, and rarely did she ever stop by my classroom or make comments about my work except in evaluations near the end of the year. I don’t know what she based my evaluations on, except for what my mentor may have told her...she only observed me once during my first year.

Mattie’s and Alexis’ experiences and decisions to leave the profession are congruent with findings from the Wynn, Carboni, and Patall (2007) study. Novice teachers need more than strong, caring mentors to retain them within the profession. Clearly these teachers needed and wanted affirmation from their respective principals. Mattie even revealed that she would earn less salary in a retail sales position but that she felt “disconnected” and “devalued” because she “did not have a relationship” with her principal. When asked about her experiences with an assistant principal in the school, she recalled that “this person was just like the principal; they both stayed in their offices

or found other things to do rather than visit teachers and students in our classroom. We just didn't matter."

Participant Carolyn Seamster, who taught fourth grade at N. L. Williams Elementary School only one year before transferring to another school district, recounted that her mentor was "quite effective," but she also related that this was an "isolated case within my school." Most new teachers "didn't have it so good; I was an exception to the rule" she noted, and "our principal said that 'all teachers are expected to carry their own weight' in more than one meeting." In further deconstructing her experiences, Carolyn cited that the "atmosphere" was "harsh, uncaring, and unsympathetic." The principal at N. L. Williams "thought we were all polished teachers, and I think she resented mentors even helping new teachers." She went on to say, "I even worried about my principal coming down the hallway in the afternoons and seeing us [mentor and mentee] working in my classroom."

These short statements by this new teacher provide insight about the perceived philosophy of the principal regarding support for teachers. Not only did most novices have a lack of mentor support, but also some of those who did experience effective mentor relationships felt threatened to seek or receive such assistance. Ultimately, Carolyn described herself as an unprepared teacher, and she suffered from a lack of self confidence because of her need for aid from a more experienced teacher. Upon reflecting about her decision to leave the school after having taught only one year, Carolyn said,



I felt punished that first year for needing help and advice; I now know that this was not my problem – it was my principal’s problem – but I felt very threatened just because I needed my mentor and her help...I just couldn’t work in these conditions.

If one accepts the overwhelming evidence from the Wynn, Carboni, and Patall (2007) study regarding the importance of mentoring, then a situation such as the one that Carolyn described almost completely guarantees a high rate of attrition among novice teachers in such settings. Not only did novices in her school feel a lack of support from their principals, but also they failed, in most cases, to have access to a quality mentoring program established within the school. Such a set of events is grounded specifically within the culture of the school, and as inferred by Carolyn Seamster, the principal plays a key role in communicating whether or not mentoring is important or significant. One is left to ask how a principal can choose to ignore significant research regarding the importance of mentoring that has been published and even assumed as common knowledge and practice for such a long time. In Carolyn’s case, both principal support and a quality mentoring program were absent in her work setting; this produced a “double whammy” effect for her and her novice counterparts. Such settings, no doubt, contribute to significant attrition among beginning teachers.

It is apparent from participants themselves that being a part of an effective mentoring program in a school is one, but only one, element of vital support. However, it can also be concluded that if novices do not feel or experience what they themselves classify as support from their administrators, then even the best structured and most

effective mentoring effort will not keep them from transferring or even leaving the profession.

Thus, the Duke study gives additional impetus to the findings in this dissertation study. Though this work did not initially seek to understand mentoring as part of administrative support, it is clear from participants and from other researchers' subjects that principals do play a key role in this particular effort. Support for new teachers can be classified, then, as a two-pronged effort: Effective mentoring coupled with principal support, as delineated in Figure 3 and discussed hereinafter, is critical to the success of beginning teachers and aides greatly in reducing significant turnover among novice teachers.

While principals do not offer the specific daily support to novices that trained, assigned mentors do, they must ensure that an effective mentoring program is both implemented with sound practices and continually assessed for such quality and warranted improvements. In these ways, principals have a direct responsibility to create the conditions necessary for success by providing appropriate scaffolding and specific structures of support designed for new teachers. More importantly, principals must intentionally engage with novice teachers, learning first about them as people and then exploring their unique needs, affirming their work as professionals, and guiding them toward improvement and success.

Based upon the findings of this dissertation study, delegating such tasks to others in a school building, including assistant principals, should not be an acceptable administrative practice. It must be reaffirmed again from a school cultural perspective

that what principals deem as important and what they give their attention to is what matters most in a school. Failing to engage personally and professionally with beginning teachers, those faculty members who need the most assistance to become successful, should not be an option. Moreover, the level and quality of principals' interactions and engagement with novice teachers is an important element of a positive and healthy school culture.

### **Principal Behaviors Interpreted as “Lack of Support”**

After re-examining the literature review included in this study and having felt the need to examine additional research, it is evident that teacher attrition continues to be a significant topic deemed important to the educational community and to policy makers, both at the local, state, and national levels. Such an importance continues to give rise to research about why teachers are continuing to leave, despite significant work in teacher retention during the last several years. Much attention has been given to the recruitment of teachers in the past, but as Ingersoll (2003) notes, the real issue related to teacher turnover is patterns and reasons for teacher migration and attrition. As he specifically stated, “...the loss of new teachers plays a major role in the teacher shortage, but pouring more teachers into the system will not solve the retention problem” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 2).

Gonzalez, Brown, and Slate (2008) engaged in a qualitative study to learn more about why eight teachers who taught only one year across the state of Texas left the profession. Among their findings, the most predominant factor centered upon “lack of administrative support” (p. 1). Teacher participants cited specific happenings within their

respective contexts, ranging from disrespect, corruptness, and reduced moral ethics to professional courtesy and overt criticism enacted by school principals. These elements, discussed in more detail in the study's findings, indicated and reaffirmed that administrative issues did influence teacher attrition and thus teacher retention. They also began to define the cultures that principals themselves created or maintained in a given school setting. Yet, these are specific behaviors found within a given context, in which some principals engage, but, as isolated events and behaviors, they do not inform the profession about how principals should approach the notion of support, nor do they inform the educational leadership profession about how it should prepare future or practicing leaders how to be supportive administrators.

Over the years, countless other findings from studies and reports also cite isolated happenings, all of which tend to focus upon the specific behaviors of administrators within specified contexts. Such findings have typically resulted in an implied code of conduct for principals but not a deep understanding of what support is and how it is constituted in school leaders. Simply publishing a litany of acceptable and unacceptable administrative behaviors, which only culminates in an infinite list of both alleged infractions and preferred behaviors, cannot represent what really are the underlying factors associated with whether or not principals are supportive. While examining the behaviors of principals through scenarios or actual events can be purposeful and instructive, it is far more important to derive how supportive environments are built and cultivated through intentional principal leadership. Thus, a deeper understanding of what teachers need from their principals is necessary, and it is through the teachers' voices that

such a theory should emerge and upon which substantive recommendations should be made.

It is important to concede here that the nine participants in this dissertation study did spend some time relating specific events and behavioral tendencies that had occurred in their non-supportive settings. By design, some of these have been included herein as supporting evidences of the major themes resulting from the study. Consequently, a list of preferred and non-preferred principal behaviors and actions could have been generated as a result of and specific to this research effort. It seemed more prudent, however, to situate these particular novice teachers' experiences within a framework of understanding regarding how principals should approach support and consequently hone specific skills and dispositions to create supportive environments, not what they should say or do in pre-defined or given situations. This intentional researcher decision led to examining the data at a deeper level, resulting in the creation of categories and their associated properties upon which a theory of principal support was generated and tested. It reaches well beyond behavioral codes for principals, though some behavioral characteristics are naturally embedded in the development of the theory.

For example, participant Anna Cantrel, a second grade teacher at Christopher Scott Elementary School, recounted a scenario where her principal walked through the school's main office and did not acknowledge or speak to her and two parents who were attempting to work together to solve a given student's problem related to discipline. This behavior, she noted, was often characteristic of her principal. Anna said,

My principal uses a ‘hands-off’ approach; she must be asked to help rather than offer assistance, even in the face of what is obviously a difficult problem...this incident left me to feel completely unsupported and on my own, without any assistance from anyone...I wanted to talk to my principal about this but later decided against it; I thought she’d take it as direct criticism and I might have to pay for that in some way.

Thus, one could cite that the principal’s behavior in this particular instance is ineffective, and a generalized recommendation could be made that, under similar circumstances, principals should commandeer control in such situations, especially where novice teachers are involved, and provide direction and solutions to such problems. Similarly, principals’ individual styles could be assessed as either effective or ineffective within such a scenario, and behavioral codes could be specified for principals so that effective solutions to such problems could be handled more expediently and perhaps even more effectively. While such a preferred behavior is connected to support for teachers in a given situation, the behavior itself cannot constitute if a principal is supportive or non-supportive. Rather, it is important to define and describe the cornerstones upon which overall support is grounded and the bases upon which principals create supportive or non-supportive conditions within their schools. It appears, then, that principals either have a proclivity towards being supportive, or they have no inclination about support and its importance. Still, there is more to understanding whether or not principals are inclined to be supportive professionals to novice teachers. Given this premise, it is important to situate this belief within matters related to school culture.

The school culture arena should be seen, therefore, as the overarching umbrella under which specific support efforts and supportive personnel, including principals, can

be found. Even within this defined context, the term “lack of support” is only generally understood. Any implied meaning typically results in an understanding derived from selected principals’ actions as reported by teachers in most given research studies published to date. Admittedly, too, it is important to capture quantitatively the number of teachers who report that they transfer or leave due to a “lack of administrative support.” Such data serves as a beginning point to understand the scope of the attrition problem as a reported reason.

These data, however, do not provide the meaning and thus the real reasons that teachers cite as a basis to prescribe “lack of administrative support” when transferring to other settings or leaving the profession. Moreover, when the designation “lack of administrative support” is coupled with other reasons for attrition (retirement, personal and family, student discipline, salary, and dissatisfaction), its meaning still remains nebulous and does not inform the public, the profession, or policymakers about what teachers really mean when they cite “lack of administrative/principal support.” Thus, generating and then acting upon a theory of how this attritional label is derived and deconstructing what it actually means is paramount to beginning to understand how the profession can reverse what has been a growing trend of novice teacher turnover.

### **Toward a Theory of Principal/Administrative Support**

Principals’ values and beliefs regarding support are situated clearly within their understandings and resulting behaviors relative to either positive or negative school cultures. Probing deeper, however, to learn how principals themselves are constituted as people and as leaders, including their individual ontological foundations, is important to

understanding what they value and consequently how supportive they are or become of teachers. This section provides insights into those very leadership practices and related skills that constitute how novice teachers ultimately assess their principals as either supportive or non-supportive.

Given the nine research subjects' varied lived experiences in diverse school communities, four major categories or themes emerged: Presence of, Communication with, Trust in, and Integrity of principals. Teacher participants offered countless stories and examples during multiple interviews about how these elements are paramount to support. Without realizing it, each related certain events, almost always in the order that the categories have been arranged (Figure 3), thereby supplying the researcher with a progression of events that were interrelated but also predicated one upon another. To develop and thus present the theory explicitly, it is important to examine each category in light of what participants noted as well as any research that gives credibility to the findings stated herein. In this way, the theory is also being tested not only through the presentations of participants' stories but also through any supporting research. Following an explanation of the interrelatedness of each category and their associated properties, a summary of the findings and the emergent theory is presented, again within the larger context of school culture.

### **Providing Presence**

Understanding the order of the categories is important to having interpreted the participants' lived experiences as influential and interpretive of the actual theory being generated. Presence of principals, research participants noted, is the first essential



building block of administrative support. A principal had to actually physically engage with novice teachers, in both group and individual settings, to convey his interest in them as people, to learn about their challenges and needs, and both to observe and listen to them in order to begin to assess how best to support them. Two levels of Presence were identified by participants in this dissertation study; they noted that the act of being physically present was a necessary first step for principals to indicate initial feelings and evidence of physically-related support. Then, they spoke more abstractly about Presence, indicating that through Physical Presence, teachers were able to assess whether principals were “really and truly with us mentally in a connected, genuine way” (Barbie Longest, focus group). Teachers could then judge the level of connectedness and attentiveness that principals displayed through an abstract understanding of Presence. Figure 3 demonstrates Presence as the first category in the emerging theory, and the ensuing data from participants form descriptions and evidences below to provide both an explication of and rationale for this first essential factor that novice teachers deemed as initially indicative of principal support.

When asked about what actions, interactions, verbal, and non-verbal behaviors indicate that teachers are being supported, participant Anna Cantrel spoke the following with regard to her first principal:

...the lack of presence is number one...that person needs to be highly visible. If you don't see them in your classroom, if you don't see them in the hall, you don't see them in the cafeteria; to me that lack of presence is probably the most destructive. I know that I keep going back to that, but presence is key – presence in the classroom, presence in other settings where instruction is going on, grade level meetings...a presence says, 'I care about these kids and teachers; I care

about what happens, and I care about you [the teacher], and I want us all to make decisions together'...so to me, presence is key.

This participant was adamant that the principal's Presence was the first key indication that he or she would offer "support." Because Anna had experienced a lack of support and then transferred to a setting that she then classified as supportive, she was able to note strikingly different patterns exhibited by her two principals related to Presence. Regarding her current supportive school setting, she offered, "My principal is always in and out of my classroom. I look up and there he is, working with students, assisting me with monitoring and questioning and even checking for progress of my students." She also recounted, "He always attends most of our grade level meetings and also participates in our PLC meetings, asking questions and pushing our thinking."

Joseph Willingham, the secondary science teacher included in this study, also alluded to this same issue. He, too, left his school after only one year because he deemed his principal to be non-supportive. "I never understood why my first principal never checked in on me. At least once a week, couldn't my boss walk in and say, 'How are things going? Are you having a good day? Are there any concerns today? Any problems?'" Being present, he noted, "shows concern, which means a whole lot to a new teacher." Similarly, participant April Jones, the middle grades exceptional children's teacher from RBK Middle School, commented, "I came to understand in three years that my principal was not at our school a lot. When she was, she rarely ever visited classrooms, except to do the required observations."

These subjects continually confirmed their expectation that their principals needed to be visible; they also cited in their own ways that they welcomed principals to visit them in their classrooms and came to expect such a Presence throughout the school. In their own minds, they simply thought that being present was part of a principal's job and were genuinely shocked when it became the exception and not the rule. Hence, the in vivo codes used as supporting properties of Physical Presence shown in Figure 3 grew out of the descriptions and scenarios that the nine novice teachers themselves used during multiple interviews.

Without the Physical Presence of principals, which continually provides an opportunity for interactions, relationship-building, and communication, the abstract understanding of Presence is nullified and therefore non-existent. Yet, for those participants who did experience intermittent Physical Presence, they also desired something other than a principal being physically present in a given school setting. Simply put, just showing up in a given setting was never enough. More specifically, as delineated in Figure 3, these beginning teachers wanted to know that their principals were also interested and enthusiastic about what was transpiring in classrooms, in meetings, and during one-on-one conversations.

Additional properties to support Abstract Presence included principals being attentive, attuned, and engaged; these descriptors came directly from the research subjects themselves. In addition to other participants, Mattie Boggs, a first grade teacher at Carrie Lee Primary School, stated that

...even if my principal was present in the room or in a meeting, it always seemed like he wasn't really there...you know, he was distanced and seemed to be preoccupied with other things. In his office, while you were talking, he would continue to type and e-mail or shuffle through papers...looking down and avoiding eye contact.

Similarly, Barbie Longest, a fifth grade teacher at Parker-Scott Elementary, reported that her principal “never really seemed to connect with me...my principal maybe didn't have good people skills...he was just ‘there’... but how does this kind of person become a principal,” she asked. In like manner, Juana Gonzales, the choral teacher at Catherine Elizabeth High School, noted that her principal “could never truly be excited about anything, it seemed.” Her conclusion was “...she just kept a grim face all the time, around teachers, students, and parents – the school didn't seem to be an exciting place for her to work, and that rubbed off on all of us [teachers and students].”

This first category of Presence is interesting given what another educational report cited, which contained several qualitative vignettes by other novice teachers who had been studied. Baldacci and Johnson (2006) summarized that what beginning teachers wanted was for “administrators to be present, positive, and actively engaged in the instructional life of the school” (p. 15). Additionally, one of their respondent's accounts, included in the report, noted, “...the principal was so preoccupied and did not make time for us...we were disappointed not to see her [the principal] in our classrooms and for her to keep such a distance from us as a staff” (p. 15). Thus, Physical Presence of and the accompanying element of Abstract Presence (Figure 3) by principals are absolutely necessary components to communicating support for new teachers. Without Presence, as

defined by novice teachers themselves, the first sign emerges that a lack of administrative support exists.

### **Establishing Effective Communication**

Clearly, teachers believe that principals must be present in two ways in order for them to establish a working relationship with teachers. This gives way to the next category, Communication, which is also a foundational piece in the emerging theory. As indicated by supporting properties in Figure 3, Communication takes many forms. Participants in this dissertation study cited numerous examples of how their principals had been either effective or ineffective communicators. Since six of the novice teachers had experienced both supportive and non-supportive administrators, they had a comparative basis upon which to state their claims, based upon two distinctly different sets of lived experiences in the field. They supported both positive and negative claims with specific incidents and examples from their work settings related to both supportive and non-supportive environments that they had encountered. The remaining three novices in this study spoke to Communication only from a negative experience since they left the profession as a result of feeling unsupported. These three participants all stated that their principals had largely not communicated with them during their brief stays in education.

All participants' descriptions of principal Communication included verbal and nonverbal mediums used by principals as well as skills related to listening, guiding, engaging in, and directing conversations, both in one-on-one settings and in larger group sessions. As participant April Jones noted during the first interview, "It is about

communication because a lot of things can just be solved by communicating effectively with us [teachers].” Later in her same interview, she cited that her principal “would just not communicate – we didn’t know what was going on with us as individual teachers or with anyone else on the faculty. Because my principal would not talk to me, I was sure that I was not doing a good job. What other conclusion could I reach?”

Rosenholtz (1991) theorized that teachers are supported when they feel “certainty” (p. 128). This “certainty,” it appears, is developed over time through positive social and cultural interactions and practices, and as a concept, “certainty” manifests itself through a myriad of interactions, with Communication between teachers and their principals cited as significantly important. One of Rosenholtz’s own research participants reported the following with regard to needing her principal’s assistance with difficult students whom she was teaching: “Well, I don’t talk to my principal; she doesn’t talk to me, and I’m sure that 100% of the faculty feels exactly the same way” (p. 132). This is likened to one of my own participant’s reported experiences. Juana, for example, summarized ineffective communication with her principal at Catherine Elizabeth High School when she recounted the following:

I could never talk to my [first] principal; she was so preoccupied with other things that talking to me, just asking me how I was doing, even personally, seemed to be unimportant. After I was hired, it was like I didn’t have the permission to converse with my principal; my mentor and the assistant principal spoke on my behalf. They also delivered messages back and forth. I felt unimportant and removed. Needless to say, there was no communication between me and my principal. I just felt ‘less than’ as a result. It was like I didn’t matter.

From both theoretical and developmental perspectives, effective Communication is a vital link between teachers and principals. While this statement seems to be rooted in both common sense and common understandings, even across multiple personal and professional settings, and certainly beyond the education profession, it can be a complex and extraordinarily difficult concept to successfully achieve. Yet, many people seem to be able to evaluate whether or not an individual, including a leader, is an effective communicator.

Brown and Wynn (2007) studied 12 principals regarding their beliefs, actions, and implemented strategies to support teachers. The art of effective communication between a principal and her teachers was interwoven much like a thread throughout their findings where principal support was deemed to be positive. One of the “supportive” principal participants responded that effective principal leadership must include the following practices related specifically to novice teacher support:

I love [beginning teachers]. I love their enthusiasm. I love the excitement they bring and their energy....And so I assign a buddy, and it's someone that I feel whose personality is very similar. And then I also assign myself, and I make it definitely clear in the interview that they'll see me a lot, and it has nothing to do with the fact that 'you're not doing well.' It has to do with 'I want to make sure that everything is going well in your room... Let's establish a rapport, a communication link'... I don't want them to be isolated (p. 679).

The word “rapport” is significant in this supportive principal’s description of novice teacher support. It speaks first to the importance of principals taking the lead to establish meaningful relationships with and among their staff, and then it implies that frequent, ongoing, and meaningful Communication is vital to providing support.

Participant Christine Bellamy, a seventh grade teacher at the James Venner School who remained in her initial teaching assignment for two years, related her experiences regarding Communication with her first principal. Among other descriptions, she offered that “Body language is so important; Mr. C. [the principal] often said one thing, but it was like he really didn’t mean it given how he acted.” With regard to collaboration as an element of Communication within the school setting, Carolyn Seamster, a kindergarten teacher at N. L. Williams Elementary School, said, “My principal did not see the importance of us [teachers] collaborating. I had been trained in college to collaborate. This was never encouraged, so it wasn’t expected either. This is because she [the principal] never really communicated with us herself...”

Typically, participants in this study cited example after example of what they classified as missing “communication techniques” (Joseph Willingham, Mattie Boggs, and April Jones). During the focus group sessions, beginning teachers related various scenarios regarding how their non-supportive principals were ineffective communicators. Of particular significance were their observations that many principals failed to offer feedback and constructive criticism. This was something that these novice teachers wanted, and while some related that in selected cases assistant principals were providing feedback to them, they so desired it, even on occasion, from their principals. April Jones, for example, said, “I loved my two assistant principals...they were wonderful and often told me what was good and how I could improve in a lesson, but I never got any real feedback from my principal. I never knew what she thought of me or my teaching.”

Figure 3 lists the associated properties that undergird and form the category of



Communication. Feedback was a significant element of Communication that these nine novice teachers desired; they wanted advice, suggestions, and helpful hints from their principals, whom they viewed as the ultimate instructional leaders in their respective schools.

When asked the question if assistant principals could substitute for principals when feedback was desired, participants stated that they appreciated the commitment on the part of assistant principals to engage with them and to communicate, including the provision of feedback, but they were never satisfied not to receive information and feedback from their principals. Joseph Willingham, the secondary science teacher at The Jesse Willard Academy, said, “I wanted to know what the principal thought about my lessons...I appreciated my assistant principals’ comments and advice, but why did I never get any feedback from my principal?” Interestingly, too, when participants were asked in a focus group if their decisions to leave their settings or transfer to other schools had anything to do with assistant principals as administrators, they said, without hesitation, that their lack of a relationship with their principals drove such decisions. April Jones commented, “In the end, I have to know where the principal stands. If I’m not important enough to be visited or talked to, then I don’t need to work for that person.”

Thus, Communication initiated, encouraged, and therefore modeled by principals is also a dominant characteristic of teacher support. This proposition is based upon the data and interpretations referenced through participants’ own lived experiences and through the findings of a study conducted with principals classified as effective and who were reported to have been supportive administrators of beginning teachers. It is

refreshing to read in current literature that some principals do understand and value the significance of being present and intentionally fostering meaningful dialogue with their fledgling employees.

In addition to the nine participants in this study, the supportive principals in Brown and Wynn's (2007) work also give credence to the emerging theory of principal support advanced thus far in this dissertation study. The constructs of Presence and Communication, as demonstrated in Figures 4 and 5, form the very foundation for administrative support, and they provide the conduit to both Trust and Integrity as final essential components upon which this grounded theory is built.

### **Building Trust**

As the theory of administrative support continues to be constructed, it is important here to return to the order of the categories demonstrated in Figures 3, 4, and 5. One must ask if Trust is built as a result of effective Communication, the second construct within this theory, and can notions of Trust also fail to develop or, if poorly established, even erode when ineffective Communication exists. Though the nine research subjects in this dissertation study helped to craft the major building blocks associated with the grounded theory, it became important to investigate whether empirical data supported to any degree the order of the categories suggested in Figures 3, 4 and 5. Among other inquiries, I was especially intrigued about what management and leadership theories outside of the field of education might espouse regarding the proposition of Trust being derived from effective Communication.

Becerra and Gupta (2003) conducted a study that investigated the impact of communication frequency on effects of Trust within business organizations. The overarching question for their research dealt with perceived trustworthiness within an organization, built upon communication within that environment. Their hypothesis was that effective or ineffective communication did influence factors related to positive or negative “trust-built” relationships (p. 32). Corporate leaders and managers, in particular, were studied with the express purpose of examining their Communication styles, techniques, and the frequency of Communication both between themselves as managers and leaders and with their direct reports or subordinates. Constructing a framework of understanding for their work, Becerra and Gupta (2003) drew upon many psychologists’ definitions of Trust, all of which have been developed and expanded over time to better understand the concept.

Because a theory is being posited in this dissertation study that incorporates Trust, it is important to define the term here and particularly within the context of this research. Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) generated an amalgamated definition of both the term and the concept derived from various psychologists. They have ascribed Trust as follows: “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (p. 398). Thus, Trust as defined here is based upon the experiences of a dyadic relationship whether constituted between two individuals, groups, organizations, or even societies. Becerra and Gupta (2003) indicate that such a relationship consists of a “trustor” and a “trustee” (p. 3). The difference between the two parties is that the “trustor” holds certain expectations about

the other party and may or may not be willing to be vulnerable to that party, while the “trustee” is the party who is continually assessed by the “trustor.”

This analogy may be applied directly to principals and novice teachers: principals are clearly the trustees while novice teachers become the trustors. Trustor-teachers continually reference and therefore make judgments about the interactions that they experience over time with their principals. As indicated in the theory regarding development of administrative support (Figure 5), positive interactions, experienced over time, yield initial notions of Trust as extended to principals by beginning teachers. The converse of this statement is also true.

With regard to the causes and the order of events that lead to Trust, Becerra and Gupta (2003) made the following claim, based upon their findings: “The core idea is that the relative effect of the trustor and the trustee on the former’s expectations regarding the latter’s trustworthiness depends on one critical characteristic of their relationship: the quality and frequency of communication between them” (p. 3). This specific proposition is congruent with the lived experiences of the nine novice teachers studied; likewise, the proposed theory emanating from this study is also compatible with and supported by Becerra and Gupta’s (2003) findings.

If the frequency for Communication is minimal, then Trust is highly likely not to develop between individuals. Similarly, as purported earlier, if principals are not present both physically and abstractly, they most likely cannot and will not engage in matters and elements related to Communication. Moreover, if Communication is non-existent or significantly restricted, a lack of Trust emerges as a predictable outgrowth. As Becerra

and Gupta (2003) also note, a trustor relies more heavily on the amounts and exchanges of information directly available regarding a trustee's intentions and behaviors as they emerge throughout the course of a relationship. Accepting this notion of trust-building, without established structures and intentionality of principals to engage in Communication, novice teachers have little to no basis upon which to build or test Trust. With regard to the educational world, Lambert (1998) noted more than a decade ago that principals must both facilitate and model effective Communication. "Trust," he said, "is built and experienced within the context of multifaceted communication systems...A communication system needs to be open and fluid, include feedback loops, and be practiced by everyone in the school" (pp. 79-80).

The beginning teachers in this study had much to say about the Trust that either had or had not been built or experienced with their administrators. As predicted, those six subjects who were able to provide a comparative basis of support and non-support by principals in two settings were able to offer how Trust had not been built with unsupportive principals as well as how it had been fostered with supportive ones. Barbie Longest talked the most about Trust with regard to her experiences as a teacher in a non-supportive setting for three years. She recounted that a very difficult student had continued to spiral out of control and that the principal, but only upon the insistence of the assistant principals, finally decided to remove the student once he assaulted both the teacher and another student. The violent student was to be sent to an alternative educational setting within the district. She recalled the principal's coming to her classroom and processing the difficulties and motivations of the disruptive student with

all of his classmates. The principal assured students and the teacher that this problem student would not be placed back in the school for the remainder of that year. This, she believed, was a supportive act on his part and allowed students no longer to be “terrorized” and would “allow them to return to an atmosphere conducive for learning” (Barbie Longest). However, within a few days, likely following an initial period of suspension, the student returned, and it was only after Ms. Longest’s students were making their way to the restroom that they discovered that the student was back in the building and had been placed in another teacher’s classroom.

Like all of her students, Barbie Longest reported that she was “devastated,” and, upon seeing the student herself, she noted, “I literally stood in the hallway in shock and disbelief.” For this teacher, there had been little Trust built over nearly a three-year period. She remarked, “...what little Trust had been built with my principal was completely destroyed.” Students, she said, kept saying to her that the principal had “promised” that this student would not be back in the school; yet, he was there, just down the hallway and would interact with them daily since he remained in the same grade level. This teacher’s reflections led her to show anger during the interview, and she expressed the following reflective thoughts:

...my principal did not communicate with me or even the assistant principals about bringing this student back. He had promised those kids, who were terrified of this boy, that this student would not return to our school that year. Instead, he brought him back, which was his decision as a principal, but he never communicated with any of us about it. Communication is a novel thing, huh? I lost all respect and trust for the man that day. I didn’t have much anyway, but this event really sealed it for me. What would have been wrong with discussing this with me prior to the boy returning? And, what about the rest of my students who were promised that he wouldn’t return? They kept asking me, ‘Why did Mr. G.

[principal] let him back in; he promised us we would not have to deal with him anymore.’ This was traumatic for me but especially for my students...I think that principals have to communicate with teachers, and when they go back on their word, they cause us [the teachers] to lose any trust that we ever had in them.

While this may seem like an isolated event, perhaps even centered within poor judgment on the part of the principal, participant Barbie’s account and her processing of the events during an interview helped to cement the notion that principals must communicate effectively for Trust to be built and maintained. Communicating effectively, in a variety of ways and over time, provides the initial bridge for Trust to be cultivated and developed. When probing deeper during a follow-up interview for more information, this same participant noted, “...there is no basis for Trust if you never see or talk with your principal. How can you know if you can trust them or not?” This is the very point that the Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) study makes: a leader must interact through Communication frequently if Trust is to be built. Admittedly, there is more to maintaining Trust in a relationship, regardless of the frequency of Communication, but it remains clear that principals cannot expect to foster Trust among their faculty members if they do not communicate with them.

Another participant Alexis Campbell noted that when principals do engage in Communication with teachers, and when personal circumstances and events are shared in such conversations, Trust can only be built and maintained “when they keep that information confidential.” Alexis, the physical education teacher at Chadbourne Middle School, related the following:

During my first year in teaching, I had some unexpected and unfortunate personal things to happen to me. Even though I was uncomfortable approaching my principal, I felt like I had to. I found out later through staff members in the office that my principal had discussed all of the information with them, so what I had said was never kept in confidence, even though I had asked for it to be kept private. This certainly didn't build any Trust as far as I was concerned. I also learned of other teachers' situations. They would tell me that sometimes he [the principal] would share confidential information in faculty meetings – right out in the open – even though they had asked him not to share their information...No, there was no Trust between my principal and me, and I think most of the teachers in our school felt exactly the same way.

Given these interpretations and findings, it can be said, then, that Communication is the antecedent of Trust. It can also be concluded that understanding how Trust is built between leaders and employees provides implications for how Trust can be created more broadly and deeply in organizations, including schools and school systems. The lower the frequency of Communication manifests itself across all contexts, the lower the potential exists for building Trust. On the contrary, Becerra and Gupta (2003) show in their data analyses that overall trustworthiness is adjudged to be significantly higher when frequent Communication is present (p. 18).

Similarly, according to Barlow (2001), a “culture of trust” must be developed in schools by principals themselves (p. 6). In addition to other means and ways, principals do this first by opening themselves up, communicating often to their faculty, and engaging continually with all constituents within their respective educational environments. Blase and Blase (2001) also offer that building trust “is the responsibility of the principal – the person with more power in the relationship – to set the stage for trusting relationships with teachers and other school staff” (p. 12). These findings regarding Trust, how it is built, and the foregoing elements of Presence and



Communication are in direct support of the grounded theory that is being generated thus far through this dissertation study.

### **Promoting and Maintaining Integrity**

It is important to focus now on the last category: Integrity. This component of the theory is manifested only after Presence, Communication, and Trust emerge as some of the major building blocks associated with principal support and school culture.

Integrity is defined extensively in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy ([www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/integrity/](http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/integrity/)). Two key components of Integrity are applicable to the emerging theory in this particular research effort. First, “personal integrity” refers to the “quality of a person’s character” (p. 1). This is judged over time, and one’s decision about another’s Integrity seems to be derived, in part, from the “consistency between words and actions” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 5) of a given person.

As affirmed by participants in this dissertation study, novice teachers continually test and re-test multiple interactions with their principals for Trust. Based upon one’s decisions about how trustworthy a leader proves himself to be, the resulting assessment made over time of that person, both personally and professionally, constitutes the leader’s Integrity in the eyes of the assessor. All nine research subjects spoke to the need for their unsupportive principals to be “consistent.” In the cases of those six novice participants who also experienced supportive principals later in their careers, they spoke about consistency as a key piece of support and drew upon two lived frames of reference.

Participants Anna Campbell, Barbie Longest, and Juana Gonzales commented extensively about the importance of principals “keeping their word.” Examples recounted by them ranged from breeches in personal and confidential conversations that they had held with their respective principals to having witnessed numerous times that principals had compromised the very values and commitments on which they, the principals themselves, had said their schools were founded upon. Seeking to find a philosophical understanding of such behavior, it is appropriate again to consult the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Integrity as a concept in this source is also defined as a person “holding steadfastly true to his/her commitments, rather than ordering and endorsing desires...Commitment is used as a broad umbrella term covering many different kinds of intentions, promises, convictions, and relationships of trust and expectation” (p. 5).

Given these descriptions as basic tenets of Integrity, it is important to turn to several notable researchers and authors in educational leadership who have addressed the concept as a necessary professional attribute of educational leaders. Thus, the professional integrity of principals lies at the very core of effective leadership (Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989), and as Evans (1996) notes, the presence of Integrity demonstrates that there exists a fundamental consistency between personal beliefs, organizational aims, and working behaviors of leaders. Sergiovanni (1992) avers that leaders who possess Integrity as defined herein are also moral agents. Put another way, but situated within the context of interpreting and understanding Integrity, leaders must do the right things to be

effective, but they must also do what is right (L.D. Coble, personal communication, June 15, 2007).

Without speaking this particular language, the participants used words like “moral,” “character,” “steadfast,” “commitment,” and “principled” to describe both what their unsupportive principals were often lacking and what they expected from them. As Figure 3 shows, these and other properties served as indicators and conditions for teachers to make assessments about their principals’ Integrity. For those subjects who experienced what they classified as support in another school setting, they all affirmed that these qualities were present within supportive principals. During one focus group session, those participants attending who had experienced only non-supportive principals in one setting and who left the profession almost marveled at their remaining counterparts who reported that the presence of those properties associated with Integrity had been experienced. Mattie Boggs, who taught in one setting for two years and then left the profession, remarked,

All of you who found another job with a supportive principal were so lucky...I just don’t understand how people can become principals who don’t have the qualities that all of us have talked about as so important...The biggest problem is when a principal, like mine, shows no integrity, then many of the other adults in the building begin to act the same way...I saw example after example where my principal went back on his word and even lied, publicly...I guess if the principal can do this [referring to lying], then the teachers can do the same thing, and I think that then gives students the right to do it, too.

The excerpt above contains powerful statements and offers insight into inexperienced teachers’ assessments of Integrity. It suggests that new teachers expect their principals to embody Integrity as has already been defined in this section. Just as

students continually examine teachers' ways and behaviors for consistency, so do teachers scrutinize principals for consistent or inconsistent messages and actions. Specifically with regard to Integrity, teachers do not expect to find mixed messages being sent by principals in matters related to ethics, trust, values, confidentiality, or principles. Moreover, participant Mattie speaks to an even deeper issue inherent in her description. The school's culture has been both influenced and affected by her principal's lack of Integrity. This suggests, again, that meaningful support for teachers lies within the school culture arena, and it also underscores the significance of a principal's ability and power to influence that culture. Mattie's short account also asks for something greater than preferred behaviors of principals. Rather, it speaks to and even questions the very heart of leadership and specifically suggests that school principals must possess and display Integrity both as people and as professionals.

These are the types of vignettes that were offered by all nine participants that allowed for a deeper deconstruction of their lived experiences. Such stories pointed the way to a theory regarding principal support, which is not specific to behaviors in given situations. Like the previous three categories interpreted, Integrity, as the fourth component in the theory, is grounded in these beginning teachers' lived experiences.

It was across their own understandings of both personal and professional Integrity that the nine teacher participants in this study assessed their non-supportive principals as being largely devoid of Integrity. Bonds of trust and trust-built relationships, if ever cultivated, were destroyed for these particular research subjects; thus, the Integrity of principals, in the views of these nine novice teachers, was

questionable at best or did not exist. Such assessments are powerful because they were made by teachers themselves; this is an especially significant finding since the participants also worked in different schools and school districts. Their own judgments and appraisals, again determined over time, logically led them to their own perceptions and subsequent beliefs regarding how supportive or non-supportive their principals were across multiple school district settings. Integrity was a significant - almost capstone-like - category that these teachers deemed as extremely important when ultimately making their claims about administrative support and lack of support.

Regarding their decisions to stay, leave, or even exit the profession, participants noted, “I determined during my one and only year with Ms. M. [principal] that she had no Integrity” (Carolyn Seamster); and “When you see principals preaching about one thing and then doing another, if not exactly the opposite, that person has no Integrity and loses the respect and trust of the teachers” (Juana Gonzales). Similarly, Joseph Willingham noted, “When you have to question every move and statement that a principal makes, because you don’t know if they’re telling you the truth, then you decide that person has no Integrity...” Perhaps participant Mattie Boggs makes the connection between Trust and Integrity most explicit in the following statements, which she shared during a second interview:

I have to test if I can trust you [referring to the principal]. It takes me some time to decide if you are trustworthy...and it is on that basis that I judge if someone has Integrity or not...If my boss does not display Integrity, then I can’t work for them – I just can’t, so that’s why I left teaching after two years...Trust and Integrity are so important in any relationship, and as a new teacher, I expected more from my principal...I became very disappointed and frustrated.

Figure 5 places Integrity as the last resulting category in the theory of principal support. Intentionally expressed as a chemical equation in Figure 5, with one category literally rendering or yielding the next, it is obvious that Integrity stems from matters related to Trust, especially as espoused through the lived experiences of novice teachers in this dissertation study. The very properties that beginning teacher participants identified as elements of Integrity, shown explicitly in Figure 3, imply that a moral, even ethical, perspective should guide a principal's work. This, too, is in keeping with what the literature (Sergiovanni, 1992) has shown in this discussion of Integrity as findings within this research.

### **Synthesizing the Theory**

Heretofore, this chapter has examined school culture as a larger context for understanding how elements like principal support grow naturally out of the conditions, folkways, morés, traditions, and customs associated with any given school's ways of operating. School culture seemingly has a life of its own, yet its many parts (actions, behaviors, customs, rituals, rites, celebrations, values, mission, environment, and climate) are situated within such a context whereby it can be adjudged as either positive and healthy or toxic and negative, as averred by Peterson and Deal (2002). It is from these individual "parts" that the "whole" is constructed and appropriately entitled "school culture." Applying the Gestalt theory to school culture and administrative support seems appropriate here; it is important to recognize that the "whole" in this case is greater than the sum of its "parts." Thus, administrative support or the lack thereof grows out of the culture of a given school and even a school district. To novice teachers, the cultural

characteristic of support is indicative of the nature and status of the culture. Some participants even used the word “culture,” but most referred to it as the “environment” or the “climate” of the school; yet, their descriptions throughout multiple interviews were insightful beyond the typical understandings of the terms “environment,” “climate,” or “ethos.”

As a result of this work, it can be concluded that a positive and healthy culture is one where strong support for teachers and students is present. On the contrary, where negative and unhealthy cultures exist, it is highly likely that meaningful support for teachers cannot be found. Given the findings through this research effort, one must question whether principals embody and display elements and behaviors related to Trust and Integrity.

The grounded theory itself was born out of teachers’ experiences in these two opposing cultural arenas. When participants described contexts that indicated a lack of support, they also indicated what they would have hoped for in the way of support and how that might have been provided. In the case of the six subjects in this study who remained in teaching but changed employment venues, they were able to provide significant data through a comparative basis for understanding and reporting both supportive and non-supportive environments.

The most compelling part of the theory being advanced as a result of this research is that all nine participants described the same categories and nearly the same properties as shown in Figure 3. There was much duplication of the properties in individual interviews; hence, it was appropriate to employ in vivo codes as descriptors of the four

categories. Searching for an analogy to describe this finding, one could say that inter-rater reliability was strongly correlated in this project, though no expectation of this fact was anticipated.

While some subjects did speak about specific types of support that could have been offered to them, such as effective mentoring programs, which fell outside the realm of Presence, Communication, Trust, and Integrity, all of them situated their assessments of supportive or non-supportive principals within these four main categories. Without exception, each novice teacher studied also made his/her decision to leave a given work setting or the profession as a result of his/her own assessment of a principal's frequency and quality of Presence and Communication. These interactions, having occurred over time, were then used to judge the levels of Trust that principals either had or had not built with their respective novice teachers. Ultimately, an assessment of each principal's personal and professional Integrity was made by each novice teacher, which then led to their independent and respective decisions about transferring from their settings or exiting the profession entirely.

Participant Barbie Longest recounted a time when her principal, who had reportedly been an effective and knowledgeable math teacher, assisted her with determining appropriate pacing and sequencing for selected strands of the fourth grade mathematics curriculum. She commented in one of her first interviews that while this was a very helpful act and even admirable on the part of the principal, such an act alone, which she termed to be "random and highly unusual," could not provide the basis upon which she judged him to be a supportive principal. Rather, she then turned in her



conversations to the four categories advanced in this theory, and it was from her assessment of these categories that she ultimately made a decision to leave the teaching profession as a result of working for a non-supportive principal in a non-supportive culture.

When a problem is identified in any context, it is always interesting to watch how those who are charged with solving such problems attempt to remedy them. Schools typically encounter many problems, some of which have multi-faceted layers and which can be quite complex. In dealing with such a problem, it is incumbent upon a committee, a faculty, a community, the district, or even an individual leader to determine the root causes of such a problem. Too often, problems are attempted to be solved by treating symptoms, but it is not the symptoms that must be treated. Conversely, it is the root cause that must be discovered and repaired in a far deeper way to eradicate the issue. Root Cause Analysis (RCA) has been defined and used across many corporate contexts. A recent recounting of a NASA mishap led one spokesperson for that organization to define succinctly why RCA is so important.

...due to the immediacy which exists in most organizational situations, there is a tendency to opt for the solution, which is the most expedient in terms of dealing with the situation. In doing this, the tendency is generally to treat the symptom rather than the underlying fundamental problem that is actually responsible for the situation occurring. Yet, in taking the most expeditious approach and dealing with the symptom, rather than the cause, what is generally ensured is that the situation will, in time, return and need to be dealt with again (from <http://www.systems-thinking.org/rca/rootca.htm>., p. 1).

Given the findings of this study and the resulting theory being advanced through this research, the issue of non-supportive principals and the resulting attrition of novice

teachers both deserves and requires that Root Cause Analysis be employed. The sequentially ordered categories and their supporting properties discovered through this research, coupled with the function of time, suggest that retention strategies by the profession can no longer be confined to suggested specific behaviors and preferred dispositions that principals ought to display and embody. Continuing to approach support and retention efforts in this manner will only further generate extended litanies of behaviors for principals in specific situations and, therefore, will treat only the symptoms associated with non-support, not the root causes of this issue. Rather, hearing from novice teachers and deconstructing their experiences across multiple contexts should form the basis for analyzing what is actually happening at a deeper level in the field. Principal support is not derived, then, from specific behaviors which some principals display and which others do not. Principal support cannot be characterized this simplistically.

Novice teacher flight continues to abound such that numerous beginning teachers are still exiting the profession. The national teacher turnover rates of beginning teachers are compelling in their own light, and failing to dig deeper about the causes constitutes both immoral and unethical leadership. In many ways, failing to address adequately the support and retention of education's newest hires at much deeper levels than heretofore calls into question the very Integrity of the education profession itself.

### **The Grounded Theory**

Figures 4 and 5 delineate the specific theory that has emerged from this dissertation study. The following statement puts forth the theory explicitly and concisely:

If principals attend positively to matters related to Presence and engage in effective Communication with teachers over time, then teachers' levels of Trust increase, promoting a strong sense that their principals have significant Integrity. It is from these categories and their associated practices and behaviors that principal support or lack of support emanates.

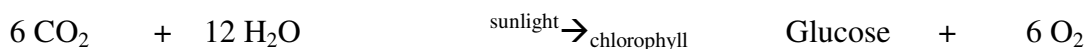
This theory is based upon component parts and their interrelationship one to another. Viewing the theory as an equation, one side is directly proportional to the other. When a positive correlation of Presence and Communication exists and increases over time, so do novice teachers' beliefs and assessments about principals' Trust and Integrity. Based upon the narrative account of nine participants' lived experiences in the field, sparse encounters with Presence yield virtually no opportunities for Communication. In the case of negative experiences in Presence and Communication, the same results typically occur, with little to no opportunity for teachers to judge principals' levels of Trust and their overall Integrity. Teachers simply do not have the basis for assessing Trust and Integrity in their leaders and supervisors when such conditions exist. Quite the opposite, when significant interactions occur that are positive and affirming, Communication increases. These two variables influence both Trust and Integrity of principals in the minds of new teachers, from which they base their decisions regarding support or the lack of it.

This theory is somewhat analogous to the scientific expression and understanding of Photosynthesis. This real-world example operates in similar ways to the grounded theory of support by administrators and therefore provides an external means to test the theory. Both the basis and the quality of a given plant's life depend upon several variables. Coincidentally, these include the balance of four organic elements: carbon

dioxide, water, a simple sugar (glucose), and oxygen. The combination of carbon dioxide and water, in the presence of sunlight and chlorophyll, yields glucose and oxygen, which are necessary for plant life to flourish (Wallace, King, & Sanders, 1988, p. 96).

This seemingly simple equation is analogous to the four categories that must be present for assessing the existence and level of principal support as defined by participants. When Presence and Communication are either enhanced or decreased through interactions over time, Trust and Integrity are either enhanced or decreased in like manner (Figure 5). Similarly, a school principal represents for novice teachers what sunlight and chlorophyll provide for plant life. When the appropriate degree of Presence plus the quality of Communication exists, the psychological processes of building Trust and assessing Integrity occur. The decision of novice teachers about whether or not they are supported results from either positive or negative interactions within these categories. As demonstrated in Figure 4, ultimately either attrition or retention results from supportive or non-supportive environments. For plant life, an inappropriate amount or the absence of sunlight and chlorophyll, variables that affect the four elements, yields detriment. The following symbolic equations, then, show the effects of the variables upon the elements/categories with respect to plant life and administrative support:

Photosynthesis:



Variables: Sunlight and Chlorophyll – positive or negative effects

Results: Sustainability or Mortality

### Administrative Support:

Presence + Communication  $\xrightarrow[\text{time}]{\text{interactions}}$  Trust + Integrity

Variables: Principals and Time – positive or negative effects

Results: Support or Lack of Support

### **Summary**

Finally, it should be stated overtly here that providing necessary and meaningful administrative support to novice teachers is situated within a rather complex set of phenomena. What is apparent through this work and the resulting grounded theory is that principals continue to hold the primary responsibility for creating conditions of support in their respective schools. Equally, principals themselves must embody and display certain positive characteristics and attributes within the categories of Presence, Communication, Trust, and Integrity. While these seem initially common-sensical and even rather simplistic in nature at the outset, how each of these categories and their associated properties plays out in the arena of principal and teacher interactions in a school setting is far more complex. The findings and resulting theory within this study are not intended to be overtly critical of school principals, and in no way does this work deny that principals have a multitude of responsibilities and tasks to attend to other than providing support to teachers. However, these findings are intended to shed light upon how significantly important the implications of this theory are with respect to supporting novice teachers in ways that best support and retain them. For those principals who are constituted in such ways and who have honed the dispositions and skills to provide personal, direct support and additional structured supportive efforts, this work affirms and applauds their practice.

For those who, for whatever reasons, do not provide support through matters related to Presence, Communication, Trust and Integrity, and who fail to retain new teachers, this work calls their practice and their priorities as school leaders into question.

One is compelled to ask what the professional response to such findings should be. The “Knowing-Doing Gap,” as defined by Pfeffer and Sutton (2000), needs to be addressed here with regard to the education profession’s commitment to promote continuous improvement, particularly as it relates to beginning teacher support. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) applied the “Knowing-Doing Gap” issues to the implementation stage of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). In many ways, the following implications regarding PLCs are analogous to the shift in knowledge and practice that must occur to eradicate non-supportive principals and unsupportive educational settings:

...we have discovered it is not difficult to persuade educators of the merits of the PLC concept. What is difficult, however, is to persuade them to implement the practices essential to the concept. The good news is that educators *know* how to improve schools and districts. The bad news is they have lacked the resolve *to do* what is necessary to convert their organizations into professional learning communities...the ‘Knowing-Doing Gap’ is a disconnect between knowledge and action and is one of the great mysteries of organizational life (p. 79).

Given the above discovery with regard to PLC implementation, it is incumbent upon educational professionals, including those who prepare principals as well as those who provide continual preparation and ongoing professional learning and support for principals, to teach, model and expect what constitutes support for beginning teachers from school administrators. Such action requires that a careful assessment and screening

of the characteristics that principals embody as people, which should be appropriately congruent with this grounded theory, as well as their corresponding behaviors and practices, be assessed continually.

As always, the success of such assessments and findings should be based upon a results-oriented examination. What do the quantitative data indicate each year regarding movement and exodus of novice teachers? More importantly, what do novice teachers themselves report about their experiences related to meaningful support within their assigned schools? These are just two results-based ways of making initial assessments of principals' commitments to providing support and creating supportive environments for beginning teachers. An extension of this suggestion, which grows quite naturally out of the grounded theory itself, culminates in several recommendations, which are stated explicitly in Chapter 6.

Finally, as implied through the grounded theory emanating from this research, providing support to new teachers must be or become part of the ontological orientation of principals themselves. Principals' understandings and notions to be present, to communicate often and effectively within their environments, and to establish both trust and integrity within their organizations either enhance or decrease the quality of the overall culture of their schools, as evidenced and reported by the nine beginning teachers in this dissertation study. Perhaps participant Christine Bellamy sums it up best in the following statements:

People who advance to become principals should know how important it is to engage with teachers. They should be excellent communicators and should encourage this for their teachers, too...After all, principals teach teachers...They

must be trustworthy people, and they have to possess great integrity. Teachers make judgments about these things all the time...They [principals] must do a lot of other things well, too, but most of all, if they are missing these qualities, then they should not be leaders of a school...I just don't understand why there isn't a way to judge these things, and then even if a person talks a good game, if they can't deliver, then they should be removed or put into another type job...This is exactly why so many people [teachers] leave...This job is hard enough when conditions are good, but when you throw in all of these other problems, it is no wonder that new teachers leave for good.



## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Introduction**

By eliminating the reason of “lack of principal/administrative support” as one cause often cited by beginning teachers, novice teacher attrition can be reduced, and overall teacher exodus can be curbed. Thus, the retention of beginning educators can be increased, which would yield one of the most valuable resources to create effective schools – the teachers themselves. This specific human resource is paramount to schools being able to accomplish their overall missions of educating all students at high levels and serves as the direct conduit to accomplish such a mission. After all, it is the teachers who are charged with providing quality instruction in the classrooms, not the principals or administrators. Yet, appropriate conditions that maximize the learning-teaching setting must be present, and it is the responsibility of principals to create these conditions. If attrition abounds, then students ultimately suffer instructionally from a “revolving door” effect of personnel, and school systems must continually sink monetary resources into recruiting efforts, training, and re-training. It would be far more prudent to assign such monetary resources, which are becoming significantly scarcer, to the ongoing development and support of an established workforce. Such investments yield far greater dividends to the educational community at large.

While the departure of novice teachers from the school setting do not account for

the total attrition of educators in schools each year, beginning teachers do represent an inordinate number of professionals who are being lost annually. In light of the findings resulting from this grounded theory study, it is important to re-state that novice teachers' encounters and lived experiences in schools are very real to them. Even though principals and administrators may automatically see themselves and their respective work as providing support, it is a common-sense approach that people largely become who others say they are, and this is worth remembering. We, ourselves, are not whom we claim to be; rather, we are the people whom others perceive us to be. In this way, when new teachers report that they have not experienced support by their principals or administrators, these perceptions are their realities, and the profession has much to learn from the stories and lived experiences of these particular teachers, which, heretofore, have remained largely undocumented and unpublished. Likewise, when teachers cite that they have been supported, it is important to deconstruct what they mean and how support is offered, not only through specific actions but also as a result of who their supporters are and how they, as people, are constituted with undeniable professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions. A compelling question remains: Do principals have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and dispositions to provide meaningful support to beginning teachers?

There is no doubt that much of what is now constituting "lack of administrative support" is centered squarely within the arena of school culture. Peterson and Deal (2002) have continually affirmed several things about culture, as follows: "Culture builds commitment...and school culture amplifies motivation" (p. 11). These researchers

further aver that principals have both a moral and a professional responsibility to foster and nurture positive school cultures as demonstrated in the excerpt below:

School principals have a lot on their minds and even more on their plates. Each day is full of situations that demand immediate attention and land mines that can explode without warning. Many people believe that principals should focus on the technical aspects of schools – especially instruction – should be at the top of the priority list. We offer another avenue. It is the culture of schools that really matters, and that is where principals need to devote much of their time and attention. Without a well-focused and cohesive set of cultural norms and values, a school is adrift, subject to the turbulent and ever-changing pressures dictating the next promising direction to take. Without a cultural compass, a school becomes a weather vane, with everyone dizzy and disoriented about where to head (p. 133).

The data collected and the resulting analysis for this dissertation study have culminated in generating a grounded theory. The theory is based substantially upon participants' responses to a variety of inquiries regarding their daily lives in schools, which they experienced on a first-hand basis. Given the theory that has been advanced through this research effort, in addition to applying the findings from the work of school culture experts, the profession has a renewed responsibility to study further and more deeply how novice teachers both experience and define "lack of administrative support." Given what is known now, school principals have a duty to examine who they are as professionals and how well prepared they are to offer the kinds of support that novice teachers report that they need.

## **Recommendations**

Given the foregoing introductory statements, the findings presented through this research, and the grounded theory that has emerged from this dissertation study, the following specific recommendations are made:

1. University-based educational leadership programs should prepare principal candidates with the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are associated with positive school cultures. Not only should candidates learn extensively from the published literature in this area, but also they should be required to participate in supervised field experiences that allow them to assess the cultures of schools. By design, they should encounter both healthy and toxic cultural settings and process the reasons for their findings in addition to addressing how to change a toxic culture. In this way, a spiraling curriculum strand could be implemented in the formal leadership preparation program, with school culture used as the theoretical framework for how principals continually make decisions and then assess the results of those decisions in light of positive or negative cultures. In particular, specific attention should be given to the importance of and how to build strong relationships with teachers as well as how to build and maintain healthy cultures of trust. Explicit knowledge and experience should also be gained in the areas of visibility, communication, and matters related to ethics and integrity.

2. All principal candidates should be trained initially through their respective school leadership preparation programs and then continue to learn through specific, directed professional learning venues what constitutes current best practices and promising strategies in the area of teacher retention. Learning how best to support novice teachers through data-driven models and then implement such knowledge into practice is critical. This is analogous to teachers applying the ongoing development of their own knowledge about how students learn as well as what emerging research continually provides about human growth and development as these constructs affect classroom instruction and student achievement.
3. In addition to implementing effective mentoring programs, a school-based support system - designed specifically to assist novice teachers - should be created, implemented, evaluated, and tended to by principals themselves. As implicitly stated throughout this research, what principals see as important and what they give their attention to translates into what is important in the school, including how principals present themselves as supporters of both novice and career teachers. Principals must be held accountable for the retention of their teachers on a year-by-year basis, with school districts assessing retention and attrition through annual measurable results.
4. Principals should not be allowed to delegate the responsibility of providing support for new teachers to lead mentors or even to assistant principals. Clearly,

these particular personnel need to be directly involved in any support efforts, but principals need to treat support efforts as personal and professional priorities and responsibilities. This recommendation is made upon the premise that principals themselves are the key players in the retention equation; therefore, principals remain the point personnel in supporting new teachers. It is also based upon participants' responses that decisions to remain or leave a setting are based upon interactions and support offered by principals, not others in a school. As a measure of accountability and progress, principals should be evaluated by their teachers regarding the working conditions and climate that they experience, which teachers themselves can best assess. This feedback should be incorporated into principals' annual summative evaluations, including qualitatively-based retention and attrition data. North Carolina's *Teacher Working Conditions Survey* provides one example and basis upon which to develop a data collection instrument for this purpose, although currently, such an assessment by North Carolina teachers is conducted bi-yearly and not annually.

5. A district-based support program for novice teachers should be in place in every school system. Such support programs may be more effective when linked to a university partner who both prepares teachers and principals for their respective work. A district-based effort would serve as a centralized support program, acting as the umbrella under which district philosophies, specific practices, and expectations surrounding support would be coordinated throughout a school

system. Such a program would also employ a director or facilitator who would continually engage in research linked to support that new teachers need and the retention efforts that are most promising to retain quality new teachers within their respective school and district settings.

6. Potential principal applicants should be screened through a variety of assessments to measure their likelihood of being visible and present with teachers, communicating effectively with them, and establishing trust and building integrity across a cadre of diverse faculty members. Principals should also continually be assessed by district leaders and supervisors with regard to these elements, using a results-based approach to make such assessments. One critical piece of evidence would be teachers' accounts, and this can be accomplished in a myriad of ways, not the least of which is the method already addressed in recommendation # 4.

### **Unexpected Findings**

With specific regard to the Miller School District, it became evident through interviews that many young teachers had left one particular school, as reported by the participant who represented this school system. A principal, whose eight-year tenure was characterized by this participant as unsupportive and producing a negative culture, lost countless young and experienced teachers over time. This discovery indicates that a disproportionately high number of schools likely exist where both a lack of principal support and high attrition rates among novice teachers can be found.

Such contexts, then, provide the impetus for further research, both in school culture and novice support efforts. Given the emerging theory in this study, one could

conduct additional qualitative research through the inquiry method of case study or bounded case study so that further testing of the theory could be conducted within one specific school context. Surprisingly, this school exists within a district that has a formal and effective system-wide support program for first and second year teachers, which, as noted in the school district portraits in Chapter 4, was recognized by the state for its innovative and effective support efforts. One has to ask how such a school can exist within a district that has earned such distinction. Do these issues in one school go unnoticed? Does the “law of averages” for the district’s low attrition rates, and therefore its award, mask the existence of such a setting? Furthermore, is such a discovery an anomaly itself, specific to this school district, or is this unexpected finding likely to be an inherent issue across many school districts? This particular discovery also undergirds the finding and resulting recommendation that a district program of support is not a sufficient effort in and of itself to constitute adequate support and cannot replace a school-based/site-based effort where principals themselves must be fully engaged in providing direct support to new teachers.

Another finding associated with this dissertation study was that those three research subjects who had left the profession after one, two, or three years of experience in teaching offered more limited views of support and non-support as compared to their six counterparts who had experienced non-supportive followed by supportive settings. While this was not completely surprising, if this research had been limited to investigating the topic as a grounded theory study with only subjects who had left the teaching profession, the data would not have been as rich, and the interpretations would



have been much more limited in scope. The differences in lived experiences between these two groups of novice teachers were notable throughout the research process. As the researcher, I had to craft significantly different follow-up protocols for the three participants who had experienced only one school setting, which, according to them, had been unsupportive contexts. Still, these teachers' offerings, their own stories, and their individual and collective experiences were enriching in their own ways, and such contributions added to the overall construction and understanding of the theory that emerged as a result of this work.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Because a grounded theory regarding principal support has emerged from studying nine teachers, additional research needs to be conducted across larger contexts. Doing so would allow the theory to continue to be tested across a wider participant sample. A larger context could be defined as a single school district, a combination of school districts, schools and systems within different educational regions of a state, or even selected types of schools and/or districts from among several states.

It would be interesting, too, to investigate the theory from the perspective of career teachers. How do more experienced teachers describe support or lack of it from a school cultural perspective? What were their experiences as beginning teachers, and for those who would report that they experienced a lack of support in their beginning years, did they simply "survive" it, did they change schools or districts, and what coping strategies did they employ to remain in teaching? It would be equally interesting to investigate if commonalities exist among effective support efforts for both beginning and

career teachers. These potential insights and the answers to other questions from career teachers could help to understand further what these teachers envision support to be and how a school's culture either embraces or negates support for success.

Equally interesting would be to conduct research with principals themselves. Learning more about how reportedly supportive principals approach their work, how they are constituted as people first, and how their overall beings connect to their performance and work could shed additional light on the cultural element of support.

This dissertation study reported some of the findings from two researchers' study (Brown & Wynn, 2007) that was conducted with 12 principals about how they supported teachers. What additional revelations or affirmations of the theory posited through this work would emerge from conducting further research with such principals? Likewise, what additional findings would emanate from researching those principals who had been designated as non-supportive? What insights and understandings would the lived experiences of these two groups of principals yield with regard to school culture, overall school performance, and practices associated with recruitment, retention, and support? If the profession is serious about eradicating the problem of attrition among teachers, especially for the reported reason of "lack of principal/administrative support," then such efforts are worthwhile and deserve professional attention sooner than later.

### **Final Thoughts**

It is my desire to partner with colleagues and researchers who have an interest in and who value this research and those who seek to publish such findings. Because this research was conceived of as a vehicle to lift the voices of novice teachers and to further

enlighten and improve the profession, I now look forward to continuing to investigate matters associated with principal support and retention/attrition and to serve as an activist on behalf of teachers, especially beginning teachers, as they so deserve careful attention and assistance during their fledgling years. An affirmation of the time spent thus far and the resulting work through such a research interest provides me again with a basis for continuing to assess my own effectiveness as a builder of support within a school district. My role as a senior leader in public education continually affords me the opportunity to advance this cause, to assist principals and other administrators in creating and fostering support, and to offer guidance to those who seek to implement support efforts in their schools and districts.

### **Limitations of This Study**

Since this qualitative study sought to gather data around the lived experiences of a small, selected group of novice teachers, generalizing or transferring the findings to a larger group is restricted. It would be difficult at this point to conclude that the variables associated with the theory generated from this research could be applied to a significant number of beginning teachers and across multiple contexts. Even so, it was immediately interesting to note that the experiences, the commonalities, and thus the findings with regard to non support were so similarly shared between participants across eight different school systems. Participants were chosen across significant distances geographically, and they represented rural, urban, and suburban contexts across elementary, middle, and secondary school levels. More importantly, because all participants shared many of the same types of experiences in their non-supportive sessions, in addition to not knowing

one another, this offered pertinent evidence for and thus gave credence to the development of the grounded theory advanced through this research. The findings of this work, then, provide the impetus for additional research that could allow for appropriate generalizing.

Secondly, as the findings of this research were emerging, it became apparent that the psychology of trust building was one key component associated with support. Because it was an unanticipated finding, this study provided no formal or extensive review of this literature. Furthermore, since this study's findings indicate that trust building plays such an important part in principals' roles to both cultivate and nurture trust, this is an area for further study. Theories related to trust and any knowledge gained from studies regarding trust in educational environments should now become part of this ongoing research effort.

Likewise, the processes and conditions that contribute to the development of interpersonal relationships is not addressed in this study; however, the findings bear out that principals need to be familiar with empirical data and the related professional literature in this area, which should both guide and undergird appropriate practice in the field. Because education is a people-oriented business, some predictability of this could have been anticipated, but the extent to which this matter became a highly significant factor in the construction of the resulting theory surrounding administrative support was completely unanticipated.

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Table 1. Current and Projected Numbers of US Teachers 2003-2018

**Actual number of elementary and secondary teachers  
employed and newly hired between 2003 – 2006**

Academic Year	Total Number of Public School Teachers Employed	Total Number of New Teachers Hired
2003	3,049,000	236,000
2004	3,091,000	296,000
2005	3,143,000	285,000
2006	3,180,000	284,000

**Projected number of elementary and secondary teachers  
to be employed and hired between 2007 – 2018**

Academic Year	Total Number of Public School Teachers To Be Employed	Total Number of New Teachers To Be Hired
2007	3,205,000	279,000
2008	3,233,000	289,000
2009	3,249,000	283,000
2010	3,271,000	295,000
2011	3,310,000	314,000
2012	3,358,000	329,000
2013	3,410,000	336,000
2014	3,473,000	349,000
2015	3,536,000	352,000
2016	3,599,000	356,000
2017	3,665,000	362,000
2018	3,722,000	357,000

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 1993–94 through 2006–07; Private School Universe Survey (PSS), selected years, 1993–94 through 2007–08; Elementary and Secondary Teacher Model, 1973–2005; and New Teacher Hires Model, 1988–2004.

Table 2. Number and percentage distribution of public school teacher stayers, movers, and leavers from 1988-2005

Year	Numbers				Percent		
	Teachers	Stayers	Movers	Leavers	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
1988-1989	2,386,500	2,065,800	188,400	132,300	86.5	7.9	5.6
1991-1992	2,553,500	2,237,300	185,700	130,500	87.6	7.3	5.1
1994-1995	2,555,800	2,205,300	182,900	167,600	86.3	7.2	6.6
2000-2001	2,994,700	2,542,200	231,000	221,400	84.9	7.7	7.4
2004-2005	3,214,900	2,684,200	261,100	269,600	83.5	8.1	8.4

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), “Current and Former Teacher Data Files, “2004-05; *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000-01*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2004-301).



Table 3. Number and percentage distribution of public school teacher stayers, movers, and leavers, by selected teacher and school characteristics in 2004-2005

Experience/ Age	Numbers				Percent		
	Total	Stayers	Movers	Leavers	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
Total	3,214,900	2684,200	261,100	269,600	83.5	8.1	8.4
1-3 years	598,300	461,100	88,600	48,600	77.1	14.8	8.1
4-9 years	867,200	716,800	81,600	68,800	82.7	9.4	7.9
10-19 years	812,600	717,000	51,000	44,700	88.2	6.3	5.5
20 years or more	908,600	771,500	35,200	101,900	84.9	3.9	11.2
Less than 30 years	593,200	452,400	87,100	53,700	76.3	14.7	9.0
30-39	765,900	645,000	68,900	52,000	84.2	9.0	6.8
40-49	847,000	742,300	60,100	44,600	87.6	7.1	5.3
50 years	1,008,800	844,500	45,000	119,300	83.7	4.5	11.8

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), "Current Teacher Data File," 2004-05.

Table 4. Percentage of public school teacher movers who rated various reasons as “very important” or “extremely important” in their decision to move from their schools in 2004-2005

<b>Reason for moving</b>	<b>Public</b>
New school is closer to home	26.2
Better salary or benefits	16.5
Higher job security	19.1
Opportunity for a better teacher assignment (subject area or grade level)	38.1
Dissatisfaction with workplace conditions at previous school	32.7
Dissatisfaction with support from administrators at previous school	37.2
Dissatisfaction with changes in job description or responsibilities	18.3
Laid off or involuntarily transferred	18.7
Did not have enough autonomy over classroom at previous school	10.4
Dissatisfaction with opportunities for professional development at previous school	12.8
Dissatisfaction with base year school for other reasons	31.2

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), “Current Teacher Data File,” 2004-05.

NOTE: Movers are teachers who were still teaching in the current school year but had moved to a different school after the base year (2003-04). Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each reason individually in their decision to move from the base year school, although some reasons may be involuntary. Response choices were based on a 5-point scale, and included the following: “Not at all important,” “Slightly important,” “Somewhat important,” “Very important,” and “Extremely important.” This table includes the percent of movers who responded “Very important” or “Extremely important.”

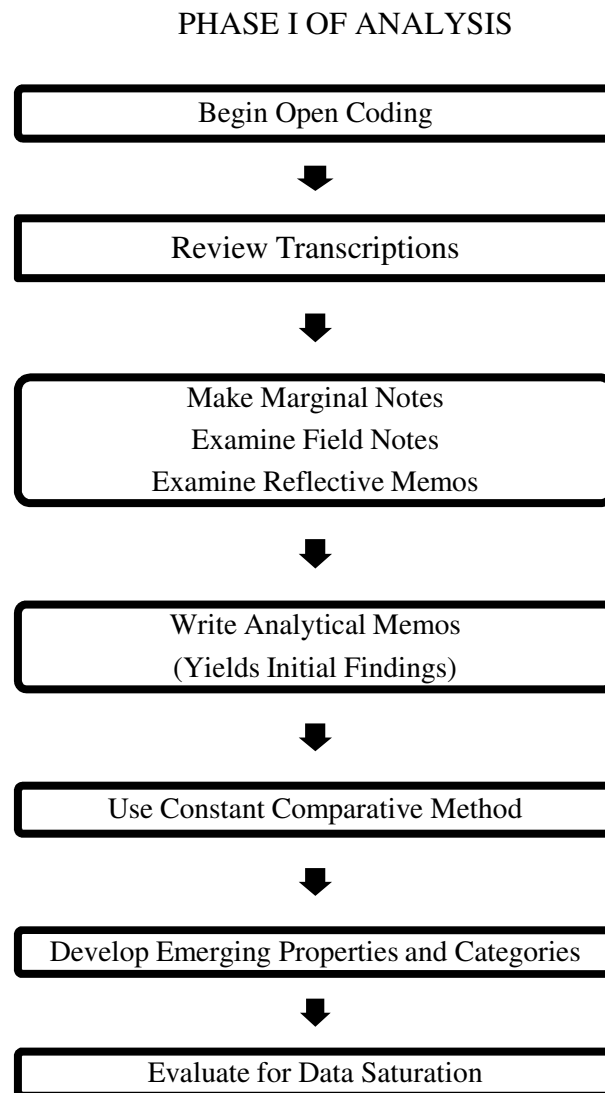
Table 5. Percentage of public school teacher leavers who rated various reasons as “very important” or “extremely important” in their decision to leave the position of a K-12 teacher in 2004-2005

<b>Reason for leaving</b>	<b>Public</b>
Changed residence	11.2
Pregnancy or child rearing	18.7
Health	11.8
Retirement	31.4
School staffing action (e.g., reduction-in-force, lay-off, school closing, school reorganization, reassignment)	14.6
Better salary or benefits	14.2
To pursue a position other than that of a K-12 teacher	25.3
To take courses to improve career opportunities within the field of education	8.9
To take courses to improve career opportunities outside the field of education	5.3
Dissatisfied with teaching as a career	14.6
Dissatisfied with previous school or teaching assignment	16.0
Other family or personal reasons	20.4

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), “Former Teacher Data File,” 2004-05.

**NOTE:** Leavers are teachers who left the teaching profession after the base year (2003-04). Respondents were asked to rate the importance of various reasons in their decision to leave the teaching profession, although some reasons may be involuntary. Response choices were based on a 5-point scale, and included the following: “Not at all important,” “Slightly important,” “Very important,” and “Extremely important.” This table includes the percent of leavers who responded “Very important” or “Extremely important.”

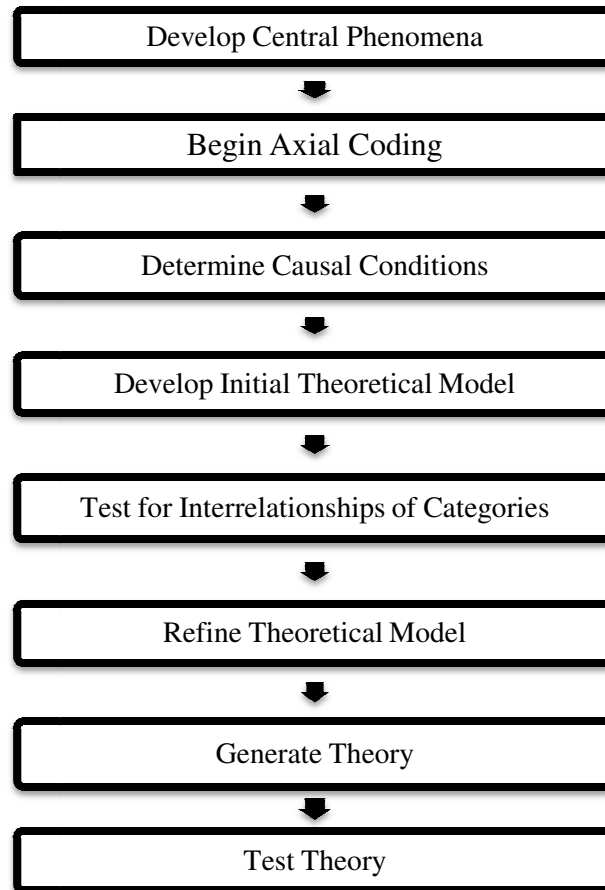
FIGURE 1: Process of Analysis for “Listening to the Voices of Beginning Teachers”: A Grounded Theory Study



The development of this figure was informed by the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990).

FIGURE 2: Process of Analysis for “Listening to the Voices of Beginning Teachers”: A Grounded Theory Study

PHASE II OF ANALYSIS



The Development of this figure was informed by the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990).

FIGURE 3: Categories and Properties

The following categories, which ultimately emerged as major themes and tenants, were identified after having studied all of the properties and their interconnectedness as described and identified by participants themselves. The properties listed below serve as examples of in-vivo codes. They can and should be interpreted both positively and negatively as research subjects described them in these two opposing ways – what they often experienced negatively and what they wished to have experienced positively.

<b>PRESENCE</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	<b>TRUST</b>	<b>INTEGRITY</b>
<u>Level 1: Physical Presence</u>	Verbal	Honesty	Moral
Classroom Observations	Non-Verbal	Reliability	Pure
Office Settings	Body Language	Confidence	Principled
Campus Visits	Written	Faith	Character
Visibility	Oral	Dependability	Sincerity
Meetings	Listening Skills	Ethical	Values
Conferences	Advice	Truthful	Judgment
Discussions	Suggestions	Prof. Respect	Commitment
Available	Helpful Hints		Steadfast
Accessible	Collaborative		Dedication
Invisible	Evaluation		Defending
Isolation	Feedback		Confidentiality
			Dignity
<u>Level 2: Abstract Presence</u>			
Interest			
Enthusiasm			
People Skills			
Connected			
Engaged			
Distanced			
Attentive			
Attuned			
Encouraging			
Attitude			

FIGURE 4: The Major Categories and Their Interrelatedness

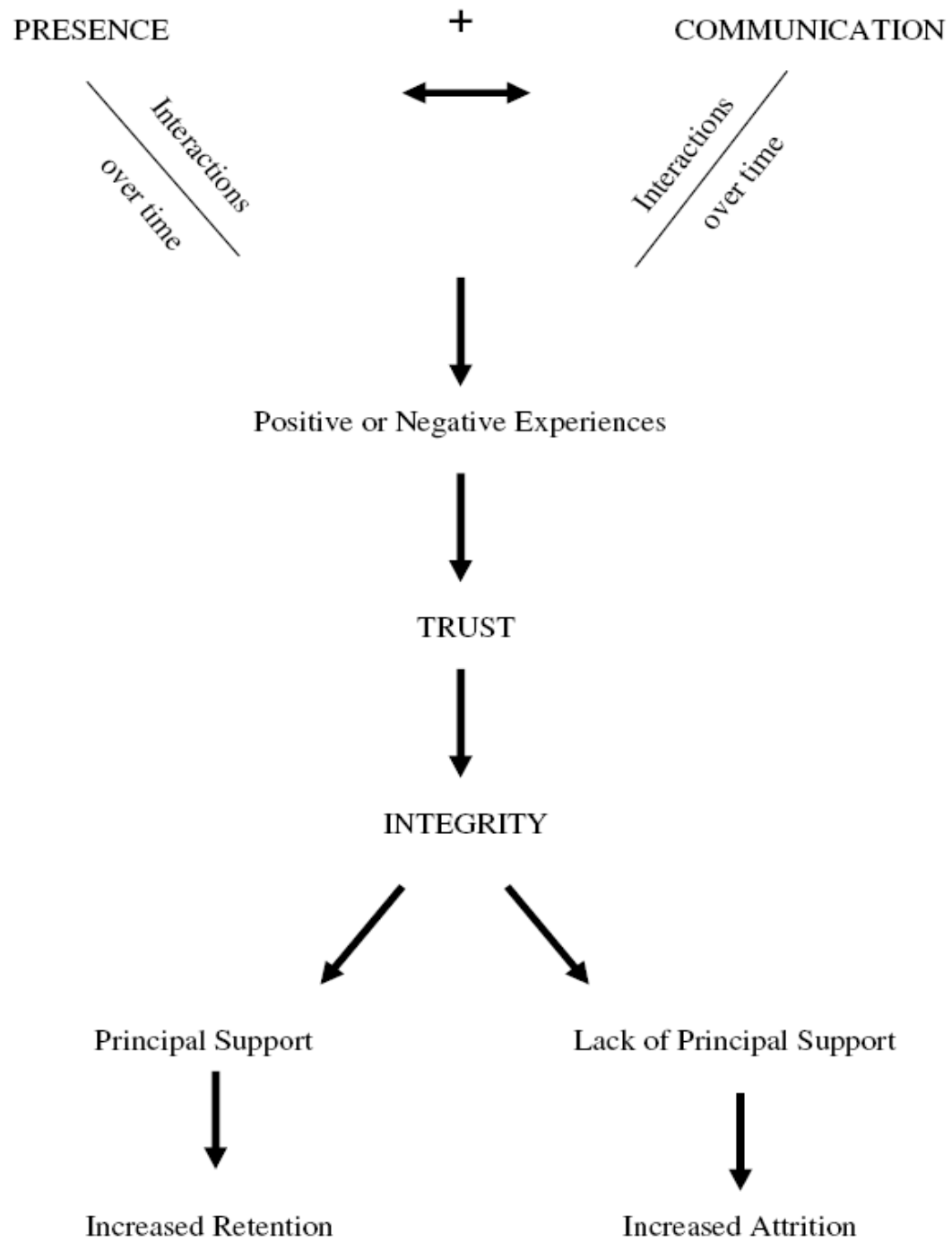


FIGURE 5: Theory Development as a Process

Based upon a myriad of interactions between teachers and principals over time, a left to right flow chart is shown below to demonstrate the progression of teachers' beliefs regarding their principals as either supportive or non-supportive:

PRESENCE → COMMUNICATION → TRUST → INTEGRITY

As the theory develops, it can be likened to a balanced equation. One side is directly proportional to the other, given the constant of interactions and time:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{PRESENCE} & + & \text{COMMUNICATION} & \xleftrightarrow[\text{(interactions)}]{\text{(time)}} & \text{TRUST} & + & \text{INTEGRITY} \\ \uparrow \downarrow & & \uparrow \downarrow & & \uparrow \downarrow & & \uparrow \downarrow \end{array}$$

Ultimately, a teacher decides if a principal is supportive or non-supportive based upon the exchanges of both sides of the equation above. Trust and Integrity increase when experiences with Presence and Communication have been positive, as indicated by the upward arrows. Likewise, Trust and Integrity erode, and perhaps become completely negative or even non-existent in the eyes of teachers, when interactions experienced in Presence and Communication are negative or lacking over time, as demonstrated through the downward arrows.

From these four interrelated phenomena, identified by beginning teachers themselves, a theory of whether or not principals are supportive may be derived.

**CONSTRUCT THEORIZED:** If principals attend positively to matters related to presence and engage in effective communication with teachers over time, then teachers' levels of trust increase, promoting a strong sense that their principals have significant integrity. It is from these categories that principal support or lack of support emanates.



## APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

**Project Title:** Listening to the Voices of Beginning Teachers: Providing Meaningful Administrative Support is a Moral Act and Results in Increasing Retention Among Beginning Educators

**Project Director:** Mark Alvis Rumley, Student Researcher and Doctoral Candidate

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### **What this study is about**

Mark Rumley, the student researcher for this study, has explained in the earlier verbal discussion the procedures involved in this research study. These include the purpose and what will be required of you. Any new information that comes up during the study will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

### **Possible good things that may come out of this study**

It is important to understand the lived experiences of beginning teachers about principal/administrative support or lack of support. The results of this research project may provide a better understanding of how principals and administrators can better support beginning (novice) educators. Hopefully, the results will provide some strategies to the profession for increasing retention rates among novice teachers.

### **Possible risks that may occur in this study**

The researcher does not believe that there are any risks to you as a participant in this research project. Perhaps there is a minor risk that in re-visiting the details related to your former employment that you may re-live some unpleasant memories or even experience some emotionally-charged recollections of your time as a beginning teacher.

### **All of my questions**

Mark Rumley, student researcher and doctoral student, has answered all of your current questions about your being in this study. Any other questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Charles P. Gause who may be contacted at 336-509-6171. You may also reach him by e-mail at this address: [cpgause@uncg.edu](mailto:cpgause@uncg.edu) or by written correspondence at 239-C Curry Building, Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations, School of Education, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina.

### **Leaving the study**

You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to be in this study at any time. There will be no penalty or unfair treatment if you choose not to be in the study. Being in this study is completely voluntary.

### **My personal information**

Your privacy will be protected. You will not be identified by name or other identifiable information as being part of this project. At no time will your name be used or referenced in this study. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym (fictitious name), which will be used in all references to you (notes, transcripts, and written analyses).

**Study approval**

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board makes sure that studies with people follow federal rules. They have approved this study, its consent form, and the earlier verbal discussion.

**My rights while in this study**

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older. You also agree to participate in the study described to you by Mark Rumley, student researcher and doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness\* to Oral Presentation  
and Participant's Signature

\*Investigators and data collectors may not serve as witnesses. Participants, family members, and persons unaffiliated with the study may serve as witnesses.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent on behalf of  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B: THE LAY SUMMARY

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn about beginning teachers and administrators' relationships, especially as the two intersect around the notion of administrative support of teachers. I am conducting research on this topic and plan to use various teachers' stories as part of my doctoral dissertation, which I am completing through the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I am really interested in your participating in this project because I think you have much to offer me about the topic of administrative support of new teachers. Either your current principal or another administrator in the district identified you as having left your first teaching venue because you did not feel supported by your administration. I hope that both you and I can learn a great deal about what teachers perceive and identify as genuine support and what administrators may need to know and do relative to supporting their new and beginning teachers. Some of our findings will likely also help to inform the educational leadership community about what the profession should be doing to support new teachers and, consequently, how retention rates of these particular employees can be increased. Perhaps there is a risk that in revisiting the details related to your former employment that you may re-live some unpleasant memories or even experience some emotionally-charged recollections.

I want you to be assured that I will be the only person (other than your current principal or district administrator who connected you to me) who knows that you are participating in this study. When I reference the information that you provide to me, I

will always identify you with a pseudonym; you may even decide what name I will use. I will need to conduct at least three (3) interviews with you, and I would like your permission to tape-record our interviews. I will also need to take some notes to remind me of our discussion points. Please be assured that I will be the only person who will listen to the audio tapes. When I am not using these items, they will remain locked in a filing cabinet to which only I have the key, and when the study is completed, I will destroy all of the tapes.

Your participation in this study will entail spending time with me over the course of several weeks or even a few months. I will begin our initial discussion by talking to you about teaching and learning and your current school setting, your classroom, your students, and your administrators. The first interview will probably take about an hour, and we will begin to know each other better during this time. Following our initial conversation, I may want to observe you in several settings. These types of observations will allow me to gain a better understanding of who you are and the work that you do. You would not need to attend to me in any way; I would just like the opportunity to observe you in the workplace. I will want to interview you again, probably for about an hour, and after each observation setting, I will want to talk with you to debrief our time in those settings. These meetings (follow-up interviews) will likely take from thirty minutes to an hour, depending upon where our conversations go. I will likely have some questions for you in each of these settings, and our conversations will unfold naturally, I hope, regarding the happenings in these various venues.

I really want you to know that as you participate in this study with me, there are never any “right” or “wrong” answers. I am most interested in your stories, your viewpoints, your feelings, and your perceptions. There may be times when I ask you to expound upon previous statements; likewise, I may encourage you to “tell me more” about a certain situation or happening that you may have begun to describe. Details are important, and I want to be sure to allow you an opportunity to go as deep and wide with discussions as you can. I will regard you as the expert in our talks because what you have to say is really important and meaningful to me. I will probably ask questions to clarify and make sure that I fully understand what you are telling me. I want to be sure to capture your stories, feelings, emotions, and opinions in thoughtful and accurate ways.

Finally, you need to know that you can decide at any point not to continue to participate in this study. This is completely your decision, and I will fully respect your wishes. If you decide to terminate your participation in this research project, your decision will not affect any future contact or interactions that you may have with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro or the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations.

## APPENDIX C: THE ORAL PRESENTATION TO PARTICIPANTS

You are being asked if you want to be in a research study. We are trying to find out about how beginning/novice teachers experience support from their school principals and administrators. You have been picked for this study because you have experienced a lack of support from your former principal/administrators and either changed schools/school districts or left the education profession entirely. This discussion and the piece of paper given to you will tell you about the study to help you decide if you want to be part of the study. You will be asked to meet with a student researcher over the course of several weeks or even months to discuss your former experiences regarding a lack of principal/administrative support. Approximately three (3) meetings/interviews will be held in convenient locations and will last between one (1) to two (2) hours each. There are no payments made for participating in this study. You will be audio recorded throughout the course of this study.

There really are no benefits to you personally for participating in this study; however, potential benefits may be realized by future beginning teachers. These future educators might benefit from the work that you help to construct through this project; it is hoped that much will be learned about what principals and school administrators can do differently to better support beginning teachers and increase the retention of these educators. There are no risks to you for participating in this study. However, there is a minor risk that in re-visiting the details related to your former employment that you may re-live some unpleasant memories or even experience some emotionally-charged recollections of your time as a beginning teacher.

Your privacy will be protected at all times. A fictitious name will be used to safeguard your identity, and all written documents, audio tapes, and media storage devices used during this study will remain in the sole possession of the student researcher. Additionally, these items will remain locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's study, and he is the only person who has access and keys to such storage areas. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

You should ask any questions that you have before making up your mind to participate in this study. You can think about it and talk to your family or friends before you decide if you want to be in the study. If you decide you want to be in the study, you will need to sign a piece of paper given to you following this oral presentation about the project. A family member or friend will also need to sign this piece of paper as the witness. If you decide that you do not want to be in the study later, you are free to leave whenever you like without penalty or unfair treatment.

## APPENDIX D: INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### **Notes to Self & Beginning Statements:**

- revisit project purpose and purpose for questions
- lay summary document
- risks & benefits – informal “informed consent”
- safeguarded information and confidentiality
- note-taking and/or recording during this meeting
- ultimate research interests in this arena
- consent form from each participant

### **Establishing Setting, Comfort, and Creating a Profile – Introductory Questions**

- a. How long have you been teaching?
- b. What attracted you to the teaching profession?
- c. What do/did you find most rewarding from teaching?
- d. What keeps/kept you going back to the classroom day after day?
- e. What do/did you find least rewarding about teaching?
- f. What would cause/have caused you to leave the teaching profession?
- g. Please describe your current/most recent school situation in terms of the following:
  - the teachers
  - the students
  - the parents
  - the administrators



**Specific Questions:**

1. Would you describe and define through some examples of your own experiences what you consider to be “administrative support” for teachers?
2. Talk to me about times / ways that you have been supported by administrators. Tell me about times that you have NOT been supported by administrators and describe those times/events?
3. Follow-up question if needed:  
Is there a specific situation you could describe to me to illustrate your point about...?
4. It is my understanding that you left a school. Can you talk to me about what led to your decision to leave?
5. What do you need from administrators to feel supported and want to stay in a school system?”
6. What roles do assistant principals and other supervisors have in supporting teachers?

7. If you were assigned a mentor or “buddy teacher,” could you describe that level of support? How was this support effort different from administrative support?
8. Would you describe your view of a “leadership team” approach that might be used in schools. What roles do teachers play? Administrators? Would you describe the interactions between these groups?
9. Do teachers often feel that the principal’s opinion or decision alone makes the ultimate difference in whether or not they experience “support”? Given your experience, can you describe any personal experiences that you haven’t alluded to already related to support or lack of support?
10. What actions, interactions, opinions, or verbal/non-verbal behaviors indicate to teachers that they will or will not be (are or are not) supported?
11. Under what conditions/circumstances should principals offer teachers unconditional support? Conditional support?
12. Given all that we have discussed today, how would you sum up a definition of “support for teachers”? In your opinion, what does true support entail?

13. Are there other things that you would like to discuss that I did not ask? Is there anything that we discussed that you would like to re-visit?

**Closure:**

Check quotes

Check any responses / review field notes with unsure meanings

Offer thanks

## APPENDIX E: DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Novice / Initially Licensed Teachers. The term “novice teachers” refers to those teachers who are completely new to the profession of teaching – those without any experience. In some states, this group is also referred to as “initially licensed teachers.” This term refers to those teachers who hold their first license, which is a provisional one, and it further classifies them as being in their first, second, or third years of teaching.

Career Teachers. The term “career teachers” refers to those individuals who have completed several years of teaching (minimum of four years) and who hold a continuing license to teach. Typically, laymen sometimes define this group of educators as those who have stayed in the profession for a lengthy time, usually without a break in service.

Principals/Administrators. The term “principals” refers to those who serve in the role of chief executive officer for a given school. This position is often perceived as the ultimate decision-maker in a school, especially with regard to teachers’ continued employment. The term “administrators” is sometimes linked to principals, but it often serves as a more generalized term for anyone who serves in a supervisory capacity for teachers. Thus, assistant principals and any other internal and/or external supervisors are categorized as “administrators.”

Teacher Retention. The term “teacher retention” refers to how many teachers are retained once they have been hired by a district. Ultimately, “retention” refers to both the length of time that teachers remain in schools, districts, and the profession of teaching. Teacher retention rates are usually measured by districts and individual schools on a percentage of “turnover” rates, which also highlight any annual percentage change in the teacher workforce in a given location.

Teacher Attrition: The rate (usually calculated in both actual numbers and corresponding percentages) of teachers who leave the profession.

Teacher Recruitment: The efforts and resources that school districts invest to attract, hire and then train new hires.

Teacher Shortage. This term, “teacher shortage,” refers to a growing trend in the United States where there are not enough classroom teachers available to fill teacher vacancies.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): Federal legislation, enacted by Congress at the urging of President George Herbert Walker Bush and a bi-partisan effort, took effect in January 2002. This unprecedented accountability act required schools to hire highly qualified teachers in every classroom and mandated states to develop assessments in basic skills (reading and mathematics) to be given to all students in particular subjects and specified grade levels. States could not access any federal money without being in

compliance with this law. Performance benchmarks were to be set and to rise gradually to 100% proficiency (on grade level) levels by the 2013-2014 school year. The emphasis on measurement was that every child, in every subgroup (economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and racial/ethnic groups) were to perform at or above grade level each year, depending upon the particular benchmarks set by states.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): The subgroups identified through the NCLB act were required to meet established proficiency standards in reading, mathematics, science, and other specified secondary subjects annually. These groups, identified within grade levels and subjects, were classified as “targets.” For a school to meet AYP, each of its “targets” had to be met, given a state’s benchmarks established for a given school year. AYP has been classified as an “all or nothing” model, meaning that student achievement within every target must be met, or the school does not meet AYP in a given year. The same standards were set for school districts through the NCLB legislation; thus, school districts must also demonstrate AYP.

Per Pupil Expenditure/Allocation: The amount of money that is allocated from state, local, and federal sources for educational purposes. The total amounts of money received in these categories are divided evenly by the number of students being served in a school or school district, and this constitutes a per-pupil amount of revenue.

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYMS AND PROFESSION  
STATUS MATRIX

<b>Subject's Name</b>	<b>School Pseudonym</b>	<b>District Pseudonym</b>	<b>Years in Initial Teaching Setting</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Grade Level Subject Area</b>
Alexis Campbell	Chadbourne Middle School	Miller School District	1 year – transferred	Employed as a teacher	Physical Education Middle Gds
Juana Gonzales	Catherine Elizabeth High	Hinshaw Public Schools	3 years – transferred	Employed as a teacher	Choral Music Gds 6-12
Anna Cantrel	Christopher Scott Elementary	Moser Graded School District	3 years – transferred	Employed as a reading teacher	Elementary Grade 2
Barbie Longest	Parker-Scott Elementary	Davis County Schools	3 years – left	Not employed as a teacher	Elementary Grade 5
Joseph Willingham	The Jesse Willard Academy	McCauley City Schools	1 year – left	Not employed as a teacher	Science Grades 9-12
Christine Bellamy	James Venner School	Meares City Schools	2 years – transferred	Employed as a teacher	Middle Grades Language Arts
April Jones	RBK Middle School	Howard School District	3 years – transferred	Employed as a teacher	Exceptional Children Middle Grades
Mattie Boggs	Carrie Lee Primary School	Loy County Schools	2 years – left	Not employed as a teacher	Elementary Grade 1
Carolyn Seamster	N. L. Williams Elementary	Williams School District	1 year – transferred	Employed as a teacher	Elementary Grade 4

## APPENDIX G: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Alvis Rumley is currently the Assistant Superintendent for Yadkin County Schools. Prior to being named Assistant Superintendent for Learning and Teaching in 2008, he served as both a faculty member and administrative staff member in the School of Education at Elon University, a position he held for nearly eight years. Following college graduation, Rumley also served as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal for public schools as follows: Alamance County Schools – English teacher; Burlington City Schools – English teacher; Alamance County Schools – High School Assistant Principal; Alamance County Schools – High School Principal; Alamance-Burlington School System – High School and Elementary School Principal. In fall 1999, he was selected as the founding principal of Audrey Garrett Elementary School, one of Alamance County’s newest schools, which opened in August 2000, and one of two schools that comprises the Hawfields Educational Complex in Mebane, North Carolina. In 1987, Mark was selected as Southern Alamance High School’s Teacher of the Year, and in 1996, was elected from among his peers as the district’s Wachovia Principal of the Year.

Rumley earned two bachelor’s degrees from Elon University in English (Secondary Education) and Music Performance (pipe organ) in 1984. He then continued his education at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, earning Academically Gifted licensure while teaching high school English. Then, Mark pursued and earned a master’s degree in Educational Leadership and Administration at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University in 1992. In spring 2006, he enrolled in the Educational Specialist degree program at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro



and, following graduation in December 2007, was admitted to the Doctor of Education degree program at UNC – Greensboro.

Mark is the proud father of three wonderful grown children. Chadbourne Mark Rumley is the oldest son, and following his college graduation in 2008, he was married to the lovely Elizabeth “Beth” Ann Moser in fall 2009. Catherine Elizabeth Rumley is “bundle # 2,” and she graduated from college in May 2010. Christopher Scott Rumley is the “baby” of the family, and he is a bachelor of professional studies student at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. These four individuals have enriched Mark’s life and have so often, even without knowing it, given him the courage, the strength, and the reason for persevering, especially during several difficult periods in his life. Mark proudly calls them his family and cherishes the many wonderful times that they have shared together over the years.

Dr. Rumley looks forward to continuing a career in education. Because his experiences as an education professor were so rewarding, he is hopeful to return to teaching at the university level at some point. In the immediate future, Mark plans to pursue the superintendency as this has been a personal and professional goal for some time.